

Three Rivers Park District Oral History Project

Consisting of twelve interviews, the Oral History Project offers insight into the early history of Three Rivers Park District. Different points of view are provided by former Park District Commissioners, Legal Counsel, Superintendents and employees. Topics include: establishment of the park system, parkland acquisition, system planning, park facility and trail development, nature and outdoor education programming, the growth in park visitation, the politics of park work, the development of natural resources preservation programs, and the Metropolitan Regional Park System.

This project was funded in part from a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society. Interviews with Charles E. Doell and Clifton E. French are generously provided by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration as part of their "Living Legends in Parks and Recreation" program. Original audio interviews and transcripts are housed at:

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Interviewees

Charles E. Doell, Contracted Employee, 1957 - 58

Charles Doell worked for the Minneapolis Park Board for almost 49 years, the last 14 years as Superintendent. In 1957, the Park District's Board of Commissioners hired Doell to develop the Park District's first system plan. This interview provides background into the parks and recreation field in the early part of the 20th century and the forces that led to the establishment of Three Rivers.

Clifton E. French, Superintendent, 1961 - 1984

Selected as the first superintendent just four years after the establishment of Three Rivers, Clif French was charged with hiring the first team of employees, land acquisition, and determining funding for the growing park system. In this interview, Clif shares his philosophy of parks and recreation, the value of independent park systems, the park system role models that he looked to for inspiration, and how the park system developed and changed over a period of 20 years.

C. Paul Lindholm, Board Member, 1966 - 74

One of first elected Board members, C. Paul Lindholm served with several of the initial appointed Commissioners appointed by the Minnesota State Legislature during the establishment of the system. Lindholm grew up in Maple Plain, where the first park in the system, Baker Park Reserve, was located, and had a first-hand view into the transformation of Baker Park Reserve from privately owned resort to publicly owned park.

Donald K. Cochran, Employee, 1966 - 88

Hired by the Park District's first superintendent Clifton E. French, Don Cochran served in several capacities including Director of Administration and Director of Operations. Cochran was intimately involved with all aspects of the fledgling park system including parkland acquisition, funding, park facility development and the integration of outdoor skills activities into established nature center programming.

Kathlyn Heidel, Employee, 1968 - 2003

Kathy Heidel was hired as one of the first members of the Park District's naturalist team. Over the years, Heidel gained a reputation for her vast store of natural and cultural history knowledge and her interest in birds and prairies. Kathy was known for her excellent teaching skills, encouraging and inspiring others to increase their own knowledge of the natural world. During her career, Heidel also became somewhat of a naturalist celebrity as a regular radio guest on Minnesota Public Radio (MPR).

David K. Weaver, Employee, 1971 – 1991

Originally hired to serve as a Wildlife Biologist for the Park District, Dave Weaver went on to serve as the Director of Natural Resources Management. In this role, Weaver was instrumental in developing many of the natural resources management strategies, policies and programs that are still viable today including prairie and wetland restoration, deer and goose management, Trumpeter Swan and Osprey restoration projects and the oversight of the Park District's unique 80/20 policy.

Raymond Haik, Legal Counsel, 1972 – 1988

Ray Haik, partner in the law firm Popham, Hiak, Schnobrich, Kaufman and Doty, was hired by the Park District as Legal Counsel in 1972. With a background in environmental law and involvement with park and wetland protection throughout the Twin Cities and the state, Haik was in a unique position to support the Park District's efforts to acquire park acreage in the western suburbs before it was developed.

Senator David Durenberger, Commissioner, 1973 - 78

In 1972, U.S. Senator Durenberger chaired the Metropolitan Open Space Advisory Board and was instrumental in bringing together seven metropolitan counties and three municipalities to create the Metropolitan Regional Park System. In 1974, Durenberger helped to secure a \$40 million regional park bonding fund that provided funding to acquire additional regional park lands. As Chair of the Board of Commissioners for the Park District, Durenberger furthered a greater leadership role for the Park District as a major implementing agency in the new regional park system.

Timothy Marr, Employee, 1973 - 2006

Tim Marr, Park District Engineer, witnessed the Park District's evolution from parkland acquisition and park development to the era of rehabilitation and enhancement. Marr was involved in dozens of park projects including the planning of park roads and parking lots, construction of the 70-meter ski jump at Hyland Lake Park Reserve, the development of lighted cross-country ski trails and snow-making facilities and the construction of the largest rubber dam in the United States at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park.

Judith Anderson, Commissioner, 1975 - 1992

Deeply committed to citizen involvement, Judith Anderson began her relationship with the Park District in 1973 when she organized the Hyland Lake Park Reserve Citizens Committee. A year later, Anderson was elected to the Park District Board of Commissioners and served for the next 18 years. With a passion for parks and the environment, Anderson focused on outdoor education as a method of encouraging understanding and appreciation of nature's resources.

Douglas F. Bryant, Superintendent, 1986 – 2008

Serving as the Park District's third Superintendent, Doug Bryant is probably best known for his focus on park development. His accomplishments include the development of an extensive regional trail system, acquisition and development of several regional parks, innovative play structures, swim ponds, construction of administrative and maintenance

facilities, golf-course expansion, and improvements to cross country ski trails. Bryant also worked diligently to develop strong relationships with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, Hennepin County, Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority, and local municipalities.

David J. Dombrowski, Commissioner, 1988 - 2002

David Dombrowski served the Park District Board of Commissioners for 14 years, eight of which he served as Board Chair. Known as a strong leader as well as an advocate of parks, Dombrowski helped to raise awareness among state legislators of the need for parks and open space while working to secure funds for park acquisition and development. Under his leadership, the Park District acquired Historic Murphy's Landing, Gale Woods Farm, and the Salvation Army/Silver Lake Camp property now called Silverwood Regional Park.

Charles E. Doell
Former Superintendent for
Minneapolis Park Board
Narrator

Clifton E. French
Former Superintendent for
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer

and

Doctor Ben Wright
Historian for the Minneapolis
Park and Recreation Board
Interviewer

October 31, 1983

CF: The American Academy for Parks and Recreation Administration has been developing the program it calls Living Legends in Parks and Recreation. The purpose is to record the history of the parks and recreation movement through interviews with leaders in the field and recording these interviews on videotapes. For videotaping today, October 31, 1983, in Anaheim, California, we have as our guest Mr. Charles E. Doell, Superintendent of Parks Emeritus of the internationally renowned Minneapolis Park System. After working for almost forty-nine years for the Minneapolis Park Board, the last fourteen years as Superintendent, Mr. Doell retired in 1959. Following his retirement, Mr. Doell began another phase of his highly productive career. He taught on a part-time basis for several years at Michigan State and Texas Tech Universities. He authored a valuable text and many articles on the parks and recreation administration in the field and did park consultant work on a variety of assignments. My name is Clifton French. I am Superintendent for the Hennepin County Park Reserve District in Minnesota. Minneapolis is located in Hennepin County. With me today to share this pleasant experience with interviewing Mr. Doell is Doctor Ben Wright. Doctor Wright is a historian who is retained by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to write a history of the Minneapolis Park System. His assignment was to write a sequel of Theodore Wirth's book which covered the first sixty years of the Minneapolis System. So

Ben Wright's job was to write from essentially the end of World War II to 1978. It is interesting to note that this year, 1983, is the 100th Anniversary of the Minneapolis Park System. On the left you'll see [looking at maps] the first plan of a Park System for the City of Minneapolis which was developed by Professor H. W. S. Cleveland back in 1883. At the same scale one hundred years later you see the Minneapolis Park System as it is today. Charlie, you started to work for the Minneapolis Park System in 1911, so for almost forty-nine years you worked for the Minneapolis Park System. Next May you will be ninety years old. Your years have covered most of the growth and development of the System. Won't you tell us a little bit about when you started to work for the Park System? What was your first job? How old were you and things like that?

CD: Clif, you said 1911, I thought it was 1913.

CF: Well, according to Ben Wright's history, it was 1911, but let's not argue about that. What did you do first?

CD: Well, first I was quite a draftsman by that time and I was making maps. I should first tell you that Theodore Wirth's method of making his improvement drawings was to take a blue-line print of either the topography or whatever there was of the park they had in mind. On this, he had outlined his walks and his play areas and other features of the park. This was all done now by pencil or colored pencil on this blue-line print. [Then] he would turn it over to me and make a drawing out of it. In other words, I would trace what there was and then fill in, according to his directions, and have a finished drawing of the improvement of a certain park.

CF: So, you were eighteen years old when you started to work and you were a student at the University of Minnesota . . .

CD: That's right.

CF: . . . and you're going to school full-time.

CD: I went to school full-time and I worked full-time.

CF: Ah, and the work that you were doing was the draftsman work for the surveyors and the mapping and things of that sort.

CD: Yes, and whatever calculations [unclear]. See, we did a lot dredging in the lakes and [unclear] would tell you before and after the dredging. Consequently, they were all on cross-section paper. From that, [they] calculated how much dredging actually took place and they paid him accordingly.

BW: Charlie, where the main improvements under Theodore Wirth tend to center, or one thinks of at least, the large lake parks and also the Grand Rounds Parkway System, were you involved in some of those major acquisitions first of all, and then also park improvements?

CD: Oh, yes.

BW: Which ones do you recall most vividly during your time at the Park Board?

CD: Well, first of all, the Grand Rounds Parkway System was in its infancy or about to be born you might say. Consequently, the acquisition of a bunch of the right-of-way was during my administration. When I say "my administration", [I mean] when I was working with the Park Board.

CF: What do you mean by the Grand Rounds Park System?

CD: That is a system of parkways which extends all around the city and becomes the parkway around the city. It starts north and goes . . .

CF: So it follows the Mississippi River?

CD: Yes. First it starts up there in the northeast corner of the county, and then westward along a straight line to the northwest corner of the city. [In that area], a monument was placed for WWI or something of that sort. Then down the western edge of the city, down to . . .

BW: That would be Victory Memorial Drive.

CD: Yes. Now, then we get in to the lake district and of course, you went around the lakes and then along Minnehaha Parkway, which emanated from Lake Harriet down to Minnehaha

Falls and also along the riverbank up to the beginning of where we started. It was designed to be a Grand Rounds Parkway System. You could start someplace and you'd go completely around the city.

CF: When the first acquisition took place, they took place to accomplish that Grand Rounds, and then as the years went by, the system took on neighborhood playgrounds and other things as the population developed.

CD: That's correct. The variations of that took place inside of the neighborhood parks you might say. Well, we had some pretty good-sized neighborhood parks. Loring Park, for instance, is an old-timer and that's a pretty good-sized park.

BW: Charlie, do you know of any other American city that has a parkway system quite like Minneapolis has?

CD: No, I really don't. Of course I don't know every system in this country either, you know, but I think we have real unique system.

BW: One of the obvious goals of the early Park Boards was to acquire lakefront property. To actually acquire the lakes in the City of Minneapolis. Were you involved in any of those acquisitions, of the actual land of those lakes?

CD: Oh yes, oh yes. Not Lake of the Isles. I cannot recall anything [like that], but Cedar Lake and part of a little bit of [Lake] Harriet, and all of [Lake] Nokomis were all during my time.

BW: How is it possible that [the] City of Minneapolis was able to acquire that very valuable land?

CD: Well, where there's a will there's a way. [Laughing] Sometimes it was paid out of general bond issues. Sometimes there might have been special assessments to bring the property under what we called at that time the "Elwell law" after the legislator who fostered the law. The Elwell law was a very valuable tool in our day because it permitted assessing property which presumably was benefited by the establishment of a park or the improvement of a park. We used it a great, great deal.

CF: So the Elwell law really was a system of proximity assessments. The closer you lived to a park and park improvement, the greater would be the share that you paid for the capital expenditure of that development.

CD: Yes, according to what we administered. It wasn't required in the law itself, but that was the way we administered the law.

BW: Was the Elwell law used primarily for the acquisition of neighborhood parks or was it also used for the large lake parks as well?

CD: Well, any park.

BW: Any park. What about donations? Was any of the land in the early days acquired through donations?

CD: Oh, some of it was, yes [pause] but that was a small fraction of the whole, you see.

BW: How was the City of Minneapolis able to afford that much land that was acquired under the administration of Theodore Wirth?

CD: Well, you see, much of it was acquired through the operation of the Elwell law.

CF: [Were] there objections from citizens in the application of the Elwell Law?

CD: No, we were very careful about it, but that's a good point because initially that was done by Commissioners who [unclear] appointed by the Park Board. There was no scientific background for any of that stuff until, I was going to say, until I got into the picture from the engineering department and made some sense out of the damn thing. They didn't before that. They just did according to by-guess and by-god the way you feel about it. But we put some scientific background to the operation of it when I became influential in that end of the business.

CF: Was there anything to do in the application of the Elwell Law in terms of the developments that took place and the willingness of citizens in those areas to take the special assessments?

CD: Yes. Quite frequently there would be a citizen's movement to acquire and establish a neighborhood park knowing full well that the only way they could do it was through the operation of the Elwell Law and they accepted it very well.

BW: Charlie, the maps we looked at [in] the beginning of this interview indicate the lakes in Minneapolis. It makes it look as though those lakes have always existed in that form. As you know, those lakes were changed somewhat when they were improved. Can you describe some of the process of improving Lake of the Isles, for instance, which was kind of a swampy lake, [or] Cedar Lake [or] Lake Calhoun?

CD: Well, it's quite a long story. Brownie Lake is the one that's the farthest northwest but it was one of the later acquisitions. There was an unnatural canal connecting it with the other lakes. There was Lake of the Isles, Lake Calhoun, and Lake Nokomis.

BW: Lake Harriett?

CD: That's going around the ring quite a bit.

BW: Who did the actual improvement work in those days? Did the Park Board contract with outside contractors or did it do the work itself?

CD: No. It did the work itself. The only contracting we ever did was for bridges and things of that sort. I can't recall them contracting for anything else. Building sidewalks, yes, you know, concrete sidewalks and things of that kind. But ordinarily the improvements were entirely done by the workforce of the Park Board.

BW: Charlie, a lot of acquisition development was going on during the administration of Theodore Wirth from 1906 to 1935. What about recreational programming? I know you can talk about the innovations that Theodore Wirth made also in [the] recreational programming area.

CD: Well, recreation is kind of a ticklish word to use nowadays because the minute you step in a park you're in recreation, but let's forget about that. Recreation as a, shall we say "profession" if we want to, came in a little bit later after the parks were established. The first recreation director we had was Karl Raymond who was a graduate of Springfield

College in Massachusetts. He was a physical education man, see, and that became the essence, the start of recreation. Of course, we had ball fields, we had skating rinks, and we had things of that sort but there was no program, for instance, in neighborhood parks for anything of that sort until we got a hold of Karl Raymond. Premeditatedly we knew what we were doing.

BW: Theodore Wirth talks in his own history of the Minneapolis Park System about taking, "Keep Off The Grass" signs out of the parks when they showed up in Minneapolis. Can you tell us a bit about that whole attitude?

CD: Oh yes. Theodore Wirth figured that these damn parks ought to be used by the public. "Keep Off The Grass" signs had no place in them. So believe me, they all came down. I can remember lots of times we had some sort of a fence along the walks, you know, so you wouldn't get off the walks and onto the grass. Well, gee whiz, we got rid of that stuff. Grass was to be walked upon.

BW: What about the whole idea of passive recreation versus active recreation particularly around the lakes [and] in some of the parkways, did Wirth also introduce a more active concept of recreation in those more traditional park areas?

CD: Parks and recreation were married in Minneapolis. Recreation was, well, talk about Karl Raymond coming from an active recreation institution. In other words, you had playground apparatus and stuff of that kind but we did realize that recreation, as a matter of fact, was a much broader term. We found out about that of course, but recreation came into the park system as a separate profession, you might say.

CF: I think that's very interesting, Charlie, because your career encompasses the time when parks were [just] a physical place [that] people [went to], it was passive recreation. Then [came] the active recreation and the proactive planning for recreation activities [so that] today, recreation is the main reason why parks exist, to provide that space, that place.

CD: It is, it is [unclear]. In fact, if you want to have a good argument sometime, try to define recreation [Laughing] in parks.

BW: Charlie, can you tell us something about Theodore Wirth? What kind of a man he was, where he came from, perhaps some anecdotes you might recall about Theodore Wirth who is considered by many to be the greatest of Minneapolis' Park Superintendents.

CD: Theodore Wirth was working in one of the parks in New York when C. M. Loring or somebody visiting New York for the purpose of looking for a Superintendent, ran across this fellow who he thought would be pretty damn good. So as a matter of fact, he made arrangements to hire him and bring him to Minneapolis. Chris Bossen was Theodore Wirth's Assistant in New York and Wirth [said] he wanted to take this young fellow with [him]. Now we just came here to hire one man, not two. [Theodore Wirth said,] "I won't go. I won't go without Chris Bossen." [So] alright, Chris Bossen came with Theodore Wirth. I can understand [why] because if you knew the men, Chris Bossen was a much quieter man. First of all, Theodore Wirth can be impetuous as the devil. He may regret it the five minutes after he blew off steam somewhere but he'd blow it off. Chris Bossen was the kind of a guy that went before Theodore Wirth and would smooth out the path and then clear up the ruffles and so forth after Wirth was there. In other words, the two of them together made a marvelous team, marvelous team.

BW: I've heard you tell a story once of a man that Theodore Wirth fired.

CD: Yes, that's right.

BW: Can you share that story with us?

CD: Oh, that was simple. We had in our warehouse, you know, we always called it "the warehouse", it was a central gathering place for men, foremen and so forth, that did early morning [shifts], seven o'clock [a.m.]. There's also the machine shop of the park department, and in this machine shop was Mike Cruik, an Irishman. He'd been there, as a matter of fact from, I guess about the time we started the machine shop. Well, something happened in one of the conversations between Theodore Wirth and Mike Cruik and all of the

sudden Theodore says, "Mike, you're fired!" Chris Bossen was right alongside almost and he says, "Mike, just take it easy. Just stick around here awhile." So Mike did. Well, it wasn't long after that and Theodore looked over at Mike and just says as he often did beforehand, "Mike get me this" or "Mike do that." [But Mike replied,] "Mr. Wirth, I can't do it, you fired me just a while ago." [And Theodore said,] "Goddammit don't worry about that! You go and do what I say!" And so alright, he was back in business again.

BW: And Chris Bossen was smart enough to know that his boss might . . .

CD: He knew exactly what would happen. Chris was on to everything. Well, you can imagine how close he was if Wirth wouldn't come here without Chris Bossen. Chris was nice, easy going, knowledgeable and he knew how to work with Theodore Wirth.

CF: You're saying that Theodore Wirth had the imagination, the creativity to create the system and the drive to push through to do it and Chris Bossen was his chief administrator to handle the details and things.

CD: Yes to take the wrinkles out of things. [Laughing]

BW: Was he the PR man too to some extent?

CD: Well, naturally he was a PR man, no professional man, but he had been with Theodore Wirth in New York.

CF: But Theodore Wirth then retired and Chris Bossen became the Superintendent and at that period then you became the Assistant Superintendent . . .

CD: That's right.

CF: . . . and Secretary to the Board.

CD: Yes. I was Secretary to the Board when Theodore Wirth was the Superintendent. The Secretary to the Board was separate entirely, he not only took care of the minutes of the Board, but he ran the office. Chris had been running the office too for that matter at one time, but when Theodore retired, it was very simple, logical that Chris should take over.

BW: The Wirth-Bossen team had been such a strong one. How did the administration of the park department change, if at all, when Bossen became Superintendent in his own right? He was Superintendent for ten years.

CD: I know, but it was such a smooth transition that there [were] no real problems involved.

BW: One of the things that changed obviously in the 1930's was you had a great depression followed by World War II. Can you recall the effect that those two events had on parks and recreation in Minneapolis.

CD: No, I really can't. I can't recall. Of course you had to pull in your horns to beat the dickens during that period, but I can't remember any adverse effects except that you didn't have any money and consequently you had to restrict your operations a great deal.

CF: So this gets in to what we now call "deferred maintenance". Through the depression years, you witnessed increasingly things that should have been done but you couldn't afford to do it.

CD: Should have been done but couldn't do it, yes, that's right.

CF: What happened then, through World War II? It was very much hold-the-line. Did you lose employees to the service, that sort of thing in World War II?

CD: Oh yes, you lost employees. You see, World War II, when was that? That was a real event nobody . . .

CF: Forty-two, forty-five, in forty-five for this country.

CD: Well, I would just pass that over that's all.

CF: You became Superintendent in 1945.

CD: Yes.

BW: What was the condition of the park system that you inherited?

CD: It was good.

BW: Were there certain things that you now felt as though you could begin to do again now that the war was over, the depression was over?

CD: Well, of course. First of all, we would have a complete recreation program which you didn't have during the war. You could also carry on some of the improvement work and the acquisition work which was all thoroughly suspended during the war period.

BW: I believe you solicited and received at least three tax increases during your fourteen years as Superintendent.

CD: Well, I wouldn't be surprised about that.

BW: Were those tax increases difficult to sell through the legislature?

CD: Sure it was. Sure it was. Anything like that is not easy to do, but fortunately we had some good friends in the legislature and had some very good arguments why the increases were needed. So we got by with them alright, but it was not easy.

BW: Charlie, you were Superintendent for fourteen years. What were some of the major innovations that you recall that the Park Board was responsible for in those fourteen years, some things you were proud of?

CD: I think one of the biggest, more significant was the combination park and school.

[This is] where the park got together with the School Board and acquired properties adjacent to each other and consequently used them both, which refreshes the park recreation department. The recreation facilities [were] used by the schools as a playground. It was a recess playground. The Park Board would help new schools [by having] one big room in the basement that led out to the outside which became the playground and in there was the warming room for the winter.

CF: From those developments which were taking place also nationally, I know here in California, park schools complexes were very, very common but they were not common back in the Midwest. Minneapolis was a leader and you were the Superintendent at that time. I know my own children played on some of those park school complexes in Armatage Park.

CD: Well, Armatage Park was one of the later ones. Armatage Park, [unclear] School Park and so forth, they were pre-designed for combination use. It was a unique way of developing parks and schools together. [It] worked out very well too.

BW: Charlie, oftentimes when park professionals get together to talk about park systems, they focus on the park professional, persons like yourself. We're here today interviewing you, for example, as Superintendent Emeritus of the Minneapolis Park System. As you certainly know, independent Park Boards in particular depend very heavily on the elected Commissioners. Can you recall for us some of the relationships you had with the Commissioners during your days in Minneapolis, and perhaps recall for us some of the individuals that stand out as really civic-minded Commissioners?

CD: Well, our relationship, that is the administration's relationship with the Park Board, was in our case very cordial and very [good]. But we had fifteen Commissioners and you'll always find, shall we say, a "dog" in one of the fifteen. But largely the administration professionally and the Park Board as a policy-making body worked very well together.

CF: Charlie, just before you retired, there were efforts made in the legislature to pass enabling legislation. It was passed in 1955, and created the authorization for a county park system that Theodore Wirth, back in the mid-1930s, had envisioned--a regional or metropolitan system. You and several of your annual reports had carried on that idea to the Minneapolis Park Board. That law passed in 1955 and a county park system or Park Board was established in 1957. There was a very unique thing that happened and I'd like you to tell us about that, the Minneapolis Park Board's involvement with getting this park system established and how you had to perform as stewards of a gift.

CD: Of course, Wirth had always pushed for a county park system. This history goes to the time when a park had been used for a summer playground for church and volunteer organizations. Baker Park [Reserve] was finally donated to the park system. In that time period, the movement for a county park system was in the making. Consequently, when Baker wanted to give this to the public, he gave it to the Minneapolis Park Department as

custodian of it until a Hennepin County Park Department would be developed. The City operated it, I think for a matter of two years or something like that, until the Hennepin County [Park Department] was established. Then, the fees, the land and everything went from the Minneapolis Park Board to the Hennepin County Park Board.

CF: So in effect, the Minneapolis Park Board which not only was friendly to the establishment of the county park legislation, also served as stewards of this gift . . .

CD: That's right.

CF: . . . and behind it was the Baker Foundation which gave this 210 acres of land which is way out in the western part of the county. You became the stewards of it until a viable authority was established which became the Hennepin County Park Reserve District.

CD: That's right.

BW: Was it difficult to persuade the Park Board itself to accept that gift? I know these were days of difficulty. You had trouble with your own finances.

CD: We had a cordial relationship and consequently, the objective was not difficult at all. The objective was the same in the county and also in the park department. So it was easy to do. The technique of it was a little bit complicated, but we overcame all of those things.

CF: You and Felix Dhainin, with the permission of your park board, also served as consultants to the Park Reserve District. You worked for the Park District to develop the first plan for a system of county parks.

CD: That's right.

CF: Though that was 1957-58. Can you tell us a little about the work as you and Felix went about to do that?

CD: Well, first of all, I'm not sure we knew what we were doing. [Laughter] But there were some things that were in the wind at the time. Baker park, for instance, was simple. There was, I think I mentioned this, the day that this hill down in the south park . . .

CF: Down in Hyland?

CD: [Yes.] Hyland was easy to do. A few acquisitions were made which were not difficult, but I'm not involved in the county.

CF: But the plan that you and Felix did was adopted as the first plan for a system of county parks. That was adopted in 1958. You retired in '59 and then you continued to serve as a consultant to the park system in some of their land acquisition efforts.

CD: Yes.

CF: The Park Reserve District did not have a staff at the time, and you were serving on their forces.

CD: Sort of a fill-in. Fortunately, these various bodies had the same objective and consequently, cooperation of that sort is very simple.

BW: What kind of parks did your plan envision creating in Hennepin County?

CD: What *kind* of parks?

BW: What kind of parks.

CD: I don't think that we had a particular "kind" of park involved. Of course, there were larger areas, generally speaking for instance, municipal playgrounds. We didn't acquire them for that purpose outside. You may occasionally find one, but they were for larger parks.

CF: Yes. I think you recall, Charlie, the concept of the park reserve was evolved and you had a part in working with the Board in which eighty percent of the park reserve would be held in years down the road as a native, natural way and twenty percent for active recreation. So you call it an 80/20 theory for the park reserve which the Park Reserve District really borrowed from the Cook County Forest Preserve District in Chicago. But in those years also, you began to teach at the invitation of Elo Urbanovsky down at Texas Tech and of Lou Twardzik over in Michigan State. How did you like your teaching years?

CD: I loved it.

CF: Why?

CD: Well, here is a group of young people [and] you're introducing them to the park administration. You loved the park administration and consequently, you were thrilled that you could induce somebody else to do the same thing.

CF: Also at that time you got the idea for writing a book. Can you tell us a little bit about the motivation that you had in writing that book?

CD: Well, it was simple. We were used to doing the work and yet there was no comprehensive guide. In other words, a lot of it was makeshift and so forth, or by practice. I thought that this would be of some help in directing it toward the administration a little bit. The first edition I think I wrote myself and then Lou Twardzik came in after that.

CF: And you've had now about four editions printed?

CD: Yes, I was surprised at that. I couldn't figure that out. I picked up my copy of it just recently, and then [I saw] the cover, fourth edition. I said, "For Christ's sakes, where'd the others come from?" I couldn't [believe it]. I thought we had just one edition, but apparently we didn't.

CF: You were active in the American Institute of Park Executives. You were president back in the late '40s and you were also a member of the American Recreation Society. You were also affiliated with the Civil Engineering Society and you're one of the national leaders in the merger of the old National Recreation Association, the ARPE, American Institute of Park Executives, and the American Recreation Society. What were the things that brought about the need for that merger?

CD: Each of these organizations really had the same objective but some [were more specialized]. Why not bring them together if you can [and] put them in one organization? It was just about that simple.

CF: Yes. So we've had this merger now for seventeen years. I know that the last few years you haven't been directly in touch with things of that sort, but have you got any comment to make with respect to the need to stay together to keep that movement going?

CD: Well, I feel that I'm out of the picture and consequently, I have no influence and I shouldn't have, because these things develop day by day and I don't have anything to do with them.

BW: Charlie, Clif has alluded to all of the various things you were doing in so-called "retirement" after 1959. You not only were consulting with the Hennepin County Park Reserve District, you were teaching, you were writing a book, and you also had some other consulting projects around the country. I believe you were a consultant in Washington D.C. to Theodore Wirth's son. Can you tell us something about that?

CD: First of all, the assignments in Washington, they felt the need for an appraisal of other park systems which were part of the national park system. [They wanted] to see whether you were doing a good job, and whether perhaps [you] knew which future acquisitions to do. So a committee was selected of the professionals of the park profession itself. One of them, I think it probably was Harold Wagner of Akron, Ohio . . . and in fact, he may be the only one. Then there was a young fellow from the Interior Department, who I think was placed in our community so that we wouldn't want to stray from national functions and consequently could stay in the field there. So that was our job.

CF: So during Conrad Wirth's directorship of the American Park Service, he created this advisory committee of park professionals to help make an assessment of the National Park System's needs?

CD: Yes. I didn't know that anything followed our report or not, but that was the way it was anyway.

BW: Charlie, when you left Minneapolis, by that I mean, when you left the Minneapolis Park Board in 1959, the nature of board politics was quite different from what it had been under Theodore Wirth and Chris Bossen. Can you describe how the politics of the Board had changed over the years?

CD: Well, it became more political as a matter of fact. But I don't think there's anything unique about that. The relationship between an administration and the policymaking bodies

used to beat the dickens all over the country. It's a matter of personal influence one way or the other. So, in our case, it wasn't too difficult.

CF: Another thing that you did for the Park Reserve District which turned out to be very influential in the experience and life of that District was the first set of [an] overall, comprehensive statement of policies.

CD: Yes, I remember that. But at that time we had enough experiences with policies and so forth. Too often, you'd have a park department without any policy at all who did things according to demand of the moment. Where they were going and what their thing was going to look like ultimately, they didn't have any odd notion and didn't care. So the establishment of a policy was an important guide in their future operations.

CF: Your book of park and recreation administration talks about the important distinction between policymaking on the one hand and administration on the other. Was that distinction practiced in Minneapolis?

CD: Yes it was, and of course, sometimes it wasn't. But it should be. The commissioners are a policymaking group. The administration administers the policy. The administration has a mind of its own and knows what policies it should have. So it has a strong communication between the administrator and the commissioners. Consequently, if that's good, a fine organization evolves. In other words, the members of the Park Board confine themselves to the establishment of policy. They may be guided in what that policy should be by the administration because they have the authority to establish how [they] are going to do this, what they are going to do and who does it. The administration should be guided by the policy of this park department, of the commissioners. But the commissioners also need guidance as to what the hell this is all about, see. Consequently, the relationship ought to be cordial, it ought to be friendly, and it ought to be understanding. If the two can continue to know that "my function is this and your function is that" they won't have that difficulty, because the two will work together.

CF: Did you usually find that commissioners would accept that policy?

CD: Yes. Oh, well, you always have some bullheaded ones that would like to administer the darn parks without any interference and so on and so forth. But generally speaking, it worked out; or in our case, did really well. A great deal of that depends upon personalities and personnel. For instance, we had for a long time a communist on the Park Board. A pure and simple communist. He was proud of it, and he harangued the Board every once in a while about that. He could be a damn nuisance. On the other hand, we had some very, I was going to say "partisans", I don't mean political partisans, but neighborhood partisans, people who wanted to have a great voice in what was going to go on in their neighborhoods and so forth. So you had a lot of these various directions that you're going to and need some guidance.

CF: Charlie, I'd like to bring out a couple other things. When you became Superintendent, Hubert Humphrey was then mayor of the City of Minneapolis. As mayor, he was entitled to one of the fifteen positions on the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

CD: That's right.

CF: What kind of a supporter was Hubert Humphrey of your parks and recreation?

CD: His influence on the Park Board from his standpoint was just miniscule I would say. But there was nothing wrong with Hubert Humphrey as far as we were concerned.

CF: We've only got about three or four minutes left, Charlie, and we'd like to ask you a question about how you look at the importance of parks and recreation in people's lives today and how you look at the future of this activity.

CD: Well, of course, I believe in it, you know that. No two ways about that. Fortunately, recreation and parks have wedded a long time ago and you don't think of recreation as being something separate from the park system. On the other hand, parks are also a recreation department, so the two really don't exist in [different] systems.

CF: This being the year 1983 and being the one hundredth anniversary of the Minneapolis Park System, a system that you had more connection with than anybody else who has ever worked for the system in terms of chronology of time and the memories that you must have

and the marvelous service that you gave in shaping that wonderful Minneapolis Park System, and then to have the strong role that you had in the county park system should make you indeed feel proud and fulfilled. Was there any last words that you would like to give all your friends in the parks and recreation field?

CD: You know, in the matter of pride, if you were involved in an operation wholeheartedly, you know what that means. You know what that means because you're trying to carry on a system of policies for the public and boy, you're working for the public. You don't think about whether your name is going to be carved in stone or something of that kind. You don't worry about that. All you are doing here, you're working for a community. When you're working for the community, if you see anything successful, you have the feeling yourself of a great deal of satisfaction and pride in yourself. But that wasn't an objective, that's an incidental result.

CF: Well, then on behalf of the American Academy, and let me just say you're one of the founding members of this American Academy for Parks and Recreation Administration, and we are just delighted that we got around to getting you on tape to get some of your thoughts so that you'll be a living part of the history of this movement. I'm proud to have had the association I've had with you. You've helped me a lot with the job I've had to do the last twenty years. From all of the people in the profession, we thank you a great deal for what you have contributed and the positive, constructive, happy influence you have brought to our park and recreation field.

CD: Thank you very much, Clif.

**Clifton E. French
Former Superintendent for
Three Rivers Park District
Narrator**

**David Laidlaw
Former Director for
Huron-Clinton Metro Parks**

And

**Don Cochran
Former Director of Operations for
Three Rivers Park District**

Interview in 1981

DL: The gentleman being interviewed today is Clifton E. French, Superintendent of the Hennepin County Park Reserve District. I'm Dave Laidlaw, Director of the Huron-Clinton Metro Parks and I'll be asking some questions and Don Cochran, Director of the Department of Operations for the Hennepin County Park Reserve District, will also be asking questions and Don, would you start off asking Clif about his legendary career in parks and recreation?

DC: Clif, I think something that would be of a lot of interest for people watching these interviews would be to have you tell us a little bit about how you made a decision to get in to the field of parks and recreation.

CF: Well, I can make a long story or I can make a short story. Actually, the decision to go into this field of recreation and leisure services was made on a rice paddy in the Island of Luzon when we were in the field artillery battalion I was serving with. We were waiting, we thought, to go on the mission to attack Japan. Then the word came with the [atomic] bombs [being dropped] on Hiroshima and so forth which ended the war with Japan. It was a remarkable experience with that isolated group of men as the thought patterns changed to, "Okay, what do we do now?" We were never going to be joining the war, we were going back home. So the question was, "What are we going to do?" I was fairly late coming over there as a replacement officer. I had been coaching [high school athletics] when I went into the army, and I had intended to return to coaching. During my army service, I came to the

conclusion that I really was more interested in the broader field of recreation services. I made that decision, very calculated, and I knew when I got out of the service that's exactly what I wanted to do.

DL: Well Clif, you had a physical education and coaching background, how else did you prepare yourself for a career in recreation?

CF: Coming out of the service and using the GI Bill, I went back, and got my Bachelor's degree. I should say, however, that I graduated from high school in 1936 and I got my Baccalaureate degree in 1948; so it took me twelve years to get through college, with a few interruptions along the way. Then I went on and got a Master's degree right after that. During that period of time I did a number of things which added to it from a program standpoint, such as, I worked as a boy's program director for a Community Chest sponsored finance agency, the East Minneapolis Recreation Association. I did that for a couple of years. I had the first graduate student assistantship under Doctor Fitzgerald at the University of Missouri, the first one he ever had. He was proud of that and I was proud to be able to have that. I also became quite experienced in social recreation leadership. I used to call square dances and teach square dancing at the University of Missouri. I also taught a course in social recreation activities. I enjoyed that background of program work very much and still kept up in officiating high school athletics in Missouri.

DL: What were your degree majors?

CF: Both in recreation. The first was Recreation Leadership and then it was a Master's of Education degree in Recreation and Administration, both at the University of Minnesota. In the four years that I was at the University of Missouri I had completed all the course work, passed the written exams for the Doctoral Program, and then left and never got the thesis done. So I'm one of the [unclear] boys.

DC: Clif, as you look back on those educational experiences, was there anything that you feel was particularly helpful or possibly lacking as you prepared for a career in administration?

CF: I think the curriculums of the [19]40s and the early '50s were really very much in the formulation stage for many of the schools. The University of Minnesota was one of the leaders in starting a curriculum in this field. It had some weak spots, but it was very strong, I think, in philosophy. Doctor Fitzgerald was a very strong exponent of a sound philosophy and if it was weak, it was weak at that time on things like budget preparation, financial reports, more of the "technical" kinds of things. Strong in programming, strong in philosophy and in principles.

DL: You've worked a number of places in your long career. Tell us about some of the early ones and what it meant to you.

CF: Well, do you want me start with my [unclear] mule skinning experience? [Laughter]

DL: That might be helpful with today's budgets. [All laughing]

CF: The early ones from the East Minneapolis experience dealt primarily with elementary school, fifth and sixth grade youngsters at the time, and with the junior and senior high school youngsters on social activities at Marshall High School in the City of Minneapolis. At the University of Missouri, I was the first. And I would say that every job I have had since getting a degree, or getting the Master's degree, I have been the first to hold that particular job. I was the first instructor in recreation at the University of Missouri and a combined appointment of an extension as well as on campus. From there I returned to the University of Minnesota and became the first program director at Coffman Union, the student union.

[I] went on to the City of Edina as its first full-time year-round Park and Recreation Director. After seven years to the present job which I'm just completing twenty years with the Hennepin County Park Reserve District. So, I feel sorry for those people coming after me, but I've been the first offender. [Laughing]

DC: Clif, in the thirty-plus years of work experience you've had in the field, there has certainly been a variety of individuals who have had influences on your career. [Does] anyone in particular stand out in your mind as having direct influence in helping you as you worked in the field?

CF: I have already mentioned Doctor G.B. Fitzgerald and I think he stands out as a primary one in shaping particularly my early professional career and growth. Right in front of him, was Doctor Ed Haislet who was actually in charge of the curriculum at the time that I returned from the service. Ed was [in charge] for a period of about a year and a half before the Governor got the University on a lend-lease program on a special assignment. Well, that's when Fitzgerald came in. So, Doctor Ed Haislet, Doctor Fitzgerald. In those years at Missouri University, I got to know Charlie [Charles K.] Brightbill and Alan Sapora. I had a close kinship with them and that had a considerable impact on me. Another one at homecoming later on was Charlie Doell who was the longtime Superintendent of the Minneapolis Park system. He worked with us in the Park Reserve District and I continue that and cherish that affiliation and relationship with Charlie Doell. There are others, Al [Alfred H.] Wyman down at the University, he was in the Park and Playground Association in St. Louis when I was . . . and Al was active in the American Recreation Society. [He was] one of the early leaders and I had a considerable association with him that I cherished. Then there are others at the University of Missouri, but those, in quick way, stand out in the early years.

DL: Clif, back in 1967, we both finished up the first Revenue Sources Management School class. That was a first for NRPA, sort of, to have classes like that. It was a trend in starting education about something new. Do you have any reflections on that school or what it's meant to the profession over the years?

CF: Indeed I do, Dave. I think the Revenue Sources Management School and the other schools that have followed have provided a real needed source of continuing education for those of us in the profession. I commend you for continuing on and the faculty of that school. I turned down the invitation to do that. At the time, I didn't think I could take the time, but we have continued to send people from our staff to that school and to other schools of that kind. I, frankly, would like to see that sort of thing proliferated across the country, and indeed this is happening. I think it's important that that kind of school--

particularly in relationship to our institutions of higher learning that are having graduate curriculums in this field--be affiliated with those attempts so that we'll keep the kind of academic credibility and scholarships that really ought to go with that.

DL: The Hennepin County Park Reserve District is pretty close to twenty-five years old and being the man of firsts, you were the first Superintendent. You had a good part in the unique aspects of this organization and obviously in the success of the organization. Could you describe some of the special things that made this Park Reserve District so successful?

CF: Well, I think a number of things. First, you've got to understand that it arose really out of, and the legislation came as a result of, citizen action to bring this about--and they didn't do it easily. It took them three legislative sessions, six years to accomplish that. In those years, the Minnesota legislature met only every other year. What finally was passed as enabling legislation is very important to the character and the kind of agency that has followed from this. The first thing that it created was an independent Park Board. An independent park commission that I think the history or the track record of the park and recreation movement in this country shows pretty clearly that through good times and bad, those park and recreation agencies that serve under the independent Board fare better and generally I think do a better job than when they come in to the general purpose unit of government. That is not to say that municipal councils or county boards are not some very good systems that have come under those systems, but generally I firmly believe in that. By enabling legislation it created that and it set in law the kind of a system we were to be. It also set in law that we were not to duplicate at the county level what the local or neighborhood communities were doing . It gave them this broad guideline to our Board of Commissioners which then said, "We will create park reserves, large natural tracks of land and we will further be unique in that we will preserve that native characteristic of land. We will say that eighty percent of these lands will be held in and returned to as native and natural of state as we can bring about. Twenty percent will be used for outdoor recreation purposes appropriate to these kinds of lands. Though we don't get into ball diamonds,

tennis courts, community centers, social and cultural activities as such, we do camping and hiking and most things that people more or less do on their own steam, and that is unique.” There have been some changes in our Board. The initial Board was appointed by the County Board and they did an enormously good job in their initial appointments. Thereafter, those seven people were to be elected on four year terms. But the City of Minneapolis was not included in the district in that enabling legislation. To bring that about, which was needed from a financial base support, came about in 1965. Some of the tradeoffs that were made changed the Board from seven members to eleven and gave Minneapolis those four new positions to be appointed--two by the City Council and two by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. The three that were previously elected at-large were changed to appointed positions and assigned to the County Board to appoint at-large. It kept only four elected posts from suburban Hennepin County and those on a geographical basis. That's been in effect [for] the last fifteen years. It's worked quite well, but it's under attack now. A change has been made which takes effect January 1, 1983.

DL: How did they find you as the first Superintendent? You weren't out in the wheat field.

CF: I was at the time the Park and Recreation Director in Edina. I was on the Citizen's League Park Committee and had been doing some work supportive of the enabling legislation. I was supportive [of] the Citizen's League effort in getting the petitions necessary to go to the County Board for them to act to appoint the first Park Board. The Board of Commissioners had its first meeting in October 1957, but it wasn't until early 1961 that they decided they would hire a full-time professional staff person. The money that they had to operate was so small they didn't want to use it up in salaries. They finally came to the realization--and Charlie Doell was one that helped persuade them--that they really had to get a full-time staff person. I didn't apply at first because I thought that my strength had been in the municipal area, in programming particularly. I felt that [since] the county system was going to be based on forests and large areas that perhaps somebody with a different [background]--a landscape architect, a forester or someone like that might be a

better person [for the job]. We didn't have what's called now a "Natural Resource Specialist". But then a friend of mine said, "You know, what they really need is somebody who has a good sound philosophy of recreation." You can hire foresters, you can hire other specialists. Well that kind of intrigued me. I called the person who was spearheading the search and found out that they would be happy to consider my application. And that was successful . . . for me. [Laughing]

DL: Well, you obviously have hired some other specialists. How did you put together a staff? Did you have a principle that you were striving to achieve in that assembly?

CF: Yes I did. First of all, you have to demonstrate that a certain kind of work needs to be done. It was my deliberate objective that I knew that over the first few years we would be creating totally new jobs and I wanted them to fit the functions that we needed to have served. I did not want all of them to come from one educational institution or out of just one locale. I wanted a mixture and a breadth of the scope of experience and education, so we hired people from Minnesota, Iowa, Indiana, Purdue, Michigan, Penn State, and others. It was easier in those early years to control those selections. It's become a little more difficult now as we go to replace [people].

DC: Clif, in the several years that you've been with the Park Reserve District and specifically in the last ten years, there has been the emergence of a form of government of the Metropolitan Council, and more directly related to parks and recreation, the Metropolitan Council Open Space Commission. As a Superintendent in the Park Reserve District, you certainly have had the opportunity of seeing the impact of that upon the system. What is your opinion of this concept of government as it affects parks and recreation and what is its future do you believe?

CF: I think the regional concept here has a great validity. I suppose it mainly stems from the fact that people don't care what jurisdiction they're in when they go to recreate. They would just as soon go to the next county or the next city or the next state or even across the ocean. They'll go where they want the particular recreation activity that they seek.

However, just because there's a Metropolitan Council doing certain things with a legislative mandate in the Twin City area, my observation is now that this has been in effect since 1975, and our agency is an implementing agency in that seven county picture, and we still have the mandate to be a county system as well, my opinion is that this is not a sound pattern to go down through the years. The weakness is that the Metropolitan Open Space Commission has the mandate to plan for a regional system to the extent that the legislature approves those plans and makes capital money available. They supply, on a contract basis back to the implementing agencies, the acquisition money or the development money. But we find that the Metropolitan Council folks, being just human beings like we are, they want to make sure that their plans are carried out just the way they envisioned them. Therefore, we're beginning to see ever and ever more a reach-out to control all the way through to operations, which is the partnership and the implementing agency's [responsibility]. So I don't think it's a good sound plan.

DL: Well, don't you have any input in what plans they make?

CF: Oh yes indeed we do. Not to our satisfaction because we think that we are overruled sometimes. We also have tried very hard to get them to accept as one of their guiding policies that our county needs and objectives be met in the regional system so they would be congruent. They have been unwilling to accept this as a legitimate guideline. They have their reasons for that with which I disagree. But I also feel that if you're going to go on a regional basis, or a multi-county basis, we would be better off in Hennepin County to affiliate and ally with those on our side of the Mississippi River--Scott County, Carver County and Wright County. These four together I think have more recreation affinity and by proximity would make a more effective working unit than going to the other side of the river. They could make their combine of three or four counties on the other side of the river. I think that would be more practical. Then we could have east/west metro and they could carry their funding all of the way down to operations. That I would find very workable.

DC: Clif, there are currently proposals on ways to fund the operational part of the regional system. What is your opinion of this type of approach?

CF: Are you talking, Don, about capital funding or the operational funding?

DC: The operational funding that's currently being studied in terms of money coming in from Metropolitan Council or the State as the control points.

CF: I'm a firm believer, as you know, in user fees. I think we should be hopefully getting a higher percentage of our operating income from user fees than we're getting. We've talked a lot about this, as you know, and I'm not a great exponent at all of a regional source of operating money [that gets] allocated back through some formula basis. I don't feel that in Hennepin County, and our system at least and in our joint policy agreement with Scott County, that we . . . I think we can handle it ourselves. I think if we do that, we'll have a more prudent taxing relationship and I think it would be done. I don't think we'd have to go higher.

DL: You'd retain control also.

CF: That will help.

DL: I am intrigued by the beginnings of the Park District and I can't believe it's twenty years ago, but when you started as the first Superintendent, obviously you were plowing new ground in Minnesota. Did you not come around to a bunch of agencies professing to be regional parks and see what they were doing?

CF: Oh, you bet we did. In fact, we still do Dave, as you know. We have received a lot of help from the Cook County Forest Preserve District. In fact, one of the first trips that our Board made, on their own expense, was down to Cook County before I went to work for the District, back in 1958 or '59. After I came to work, I went to the Huron-Clinton system and the Akron regional parks. For a period of several years, I made a point every year of going someplace to see what was going on. This has culminated in to what we loosely call a "Special Park Districts Forum". We go visit one system or another with fifty or so coming from Special Park Districts. For a period of two and a half, three days, [we] really immerse

ourselves in what one system is doing and then have a chance to exchange ideas. That in-depth kind of exchange, I have found, to be very helpful for our staff and for our Commissioners.

DC: Clif, one of the things I know a lot of people would be very interested in having you share with us is the working philosophy that guides many of your decisions as an administrator in a park reserve district. Could you share that with us?

CF: Well, the time here doesn't permit, you know, for an extensive [history], [but] you can hit certain things that you believe in. First of all, coming in to this field, I looked at the Constitution, the Bill of Rights of this country. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness have been cardinal, deeply engrained, almost a spiritual belief with me. In the pursuit of happiness is where I felt that the recreation field would serve. I have had a real almost missionary zeal about this, and I still get uptight with this. Then there are certain other things that I believe in and that is, parks are really for people. We say that, we roll it off our tongues, but when you stop to think about it, you don't acquire thousands of acres of land just to acquire land. The whole purpose behind the natural resources and saving and protecting the environment is really for the present people and future generations--my children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I want these places to be kept pure and clean and fine. The Minneapolis system is a good example. It started back in the 1890s and think of the generations that would come along. I hope that our Hennepin County Park Reserve District will continue this same kind of thing. We have some criticism that we've been Cadillac a little bit and I don't believe that at all. I believe that people respect, appreciate, desire and are willing to have their tax dollars pay for good quality development and good quality operation and maintenance. I think you get more criticism when you fall off good quality and you create more problems for yourself than if you keep that up front as . . . I believe strongly in volunteers. I think we can do a lot more with volunteers. There are years at the Park District when we were mostly acquiring land and for a long time I said [that] I was more in the real estate business than I was in the park

business. But now that we're in development, we say we've got a system in use. It's only about forty percent in use, really, and we find with the entrenchment coming back in operating dollars that we're going to have to use volunteers more. We've had good experiences [with volunteers]. Snowmobilers, for instance, are bringing about an order and a control that would cost us a lot of money to pay for, but they're doing it because they want to [keep] a quality trail system [available] for them [to use]. We're getting in to horse patrol and bicycle patrol and other things as our trail system grows. This is something that Doctor Fitzgerald used to say, "A rising tide lifts all boats." It doesn't bother me when somebody else has greater success than we have had because these things have their concentric circle, impact and effect. I share in the joy when our City and our County or someplace else passes a bond election because that means that the people in that jurisdiction wanted and supported a new kind of development. This happens in many ways. An individual's success on the job with a program helps the whole agency and lifts it up. These are the things. You're really here to try to make things possible so that people can enjoy their life better and that's the whole spirit of it as far as I am concerned.

DL: You've talked about the attitude of people on parks. Having had the opportunity to visit St. Paul and Minneapolis parks and go all over your system, a delightful tour, do you find that attitudes are changing? Are attitudes becoming more destructive or less appreciative, not only at your level, but at state and federal levels? What do you think about attitudes?

CF: I think we've come through a period of the seventies where some of us became kind of alarmed about the attitudes. I think that if it's reflected at how people behave, at least in our system as we get more and more users, I believe the attitude is better. It's manifesting itself more constructively than I thought it might, say four or five years ago, and I'm very pleased. That's not to say that everything is one hundred percent beautiful, but I'm optimistic with respect to attitude. My own youngsters now are in their early thirties. They've come through this so-called "hippie" generation. You know, they and their friends

are pretty good kids. They're not kids, they're adults, but they are pretty constructive citizens.

DL: They've become taxpayers.

CF: Yes, that's right. [Both Laugh]

DL: During this tour and other times, I've seen some things that were sort of different about your system, such as prairie renovation, making a recreation area out of a dam, I'm sure you could name some others. Are there any things that you've done or achievements in the system that you're particularly proud of or want to talk about?

CF: Yes, there's one. That's what we call a creative play area. Now we've got foresters and naturalists who know more about the prairie. I'm very proud of our prairie area, five, six hundred acres up in the Crow-Hassan Park Reserve and I'm very proud of the fact that we've developed a reforestation plan which fifty, sixty years from now will see the impact as a fully mature big woods forest emerge. But I guess one of the contributions that I can kind of claim for myself, although others have done the actual design and planning, is what we call a creative play area. We have three of them. We did not want to just go out and buy the galvanized pipe or the colored painted pipe of the standard playground equipment. That's not a put-down of that equipment, but we wanted to use that equipment in a very planned way. So we started with, how do children play? How do they play creatively alone and in groups? We wanted to design an area that would fit into a particular place [like] a picnic area. As you know, [when] a family goes on a picnic, the kids are always through first. They get served first, they're through eating first and they want to be off and doing something. Mom and Dad would like to just sit there a little bit and relax, drink their last cup of coffee or something, and the kids want to say, "Come on, let's do this and that." Well, when you design a good creative play area, this gives the Mom and Dad a chance to sit there because the kids will go over here and they just [play]. In fact, we're finding that kids are bringing their parents to the parks because our creative play areas are so successful.

DL: What is a creative play area?

CF: Well, you create with slides, swings, climbing devices, balance wheels and put [them] together in a pattern or a complex where they can move from one to another safely. We tried to use them in a unique way and where there's relationship. When we opened our Larry Haeg Recreation Area up at Elm Creek Park Reserve last September, we had all six of my grandchildren out there. [I couldn't see] our little four year old [grandson], so I said, "Where's Donny?" My wife pointed and here he was sitting in a big four foot [unclear] pipe that was a tunnel through one place to another. He was just sitting there, just [doing] whatever, thinking thoughts. I don't know what he was thinking [about], [but] he stayed there about four to five minutes. Or you'll find him back in the climbing device where he can go inside and play there and be himself or with a cousin or a friend. It's working. Our theory of designing creative play areas as how kids play is working as we see it now in the flesh. They're not cheap, but they're worthwhile.

DL: When you would have an opportunity to talk to the younger professional coming up, they always want some good advice and [CF Laughing] they want to hear how to avoid mistakes. I suspect the mistakes are the most instructive. We've been pretty positive about you this morning. What in your experience would you warn them about or could relay to them as not the way to go, that you've learned the hard way? That's a tough question.

CF: Yeah, you didn't prepare me for this part. [All laughing] I'm optimistic about the recreation profession. One of the things that's difficult, however, [is] there's far more young people that are graduating with degrees and with expectancies for interesting jobs than there are jobs today, and that's too bad. It's the way it is and it seems to be a little heavier this way. We had a naturalist job open and I think we had well over two hundred applicants just for one opening and there were many fine people. But I don't think I have any [advice]. I wouldn't be discouraging because I think there will be a brighter day. Right

now, federal entrenchment, our State of Minnesota is going through a real tough financial time which has its impact back on every county and every municipality.

DL: I was referring to the mistakes you make that you come out of with a little blood on the head but never do again.

CF: Well, maybe we've been more fortunate that we really haven't had any serious things that have happened in that regard. There were those who warned us on the Coon Rapids Dam Park that that was one great big potential disaster area, but so far, it has not proved to be that.

DL: How did you avoid it?

CF: Well, we didn't. We just went out doing our thing and we just haven't had the problems that would come out on that. However, we may not be out of the woods. The shortage of energy may bring about the re-retrofitting that Dam again to generate power. We have applied under the federal law for the permit but so have about eight or nine private parties plus another municipality and we're not sure how that is going to come out. We are not happy about somebody else getting a permit on property that we own as park land.

DL: You weren't thinking of the revenue that might be forthcoming?

CF: Well, it will generate some revenue alright, and we would certainly welcome that. We do know enough about it that it's possible, under new technology, to generate hydropower more than it used to generate and still keep it as a unique recreation feature. It will impair it a little bit, but not seriously.

DL: It sounds like quite a facility.

CF: It truly is unique. We're excited about that.

DC: Clif, in answering these various questions today I think that the viewer gets a profile of you [as] an administrator who has a lot of courage of his convictions. What is your advice to people as they come in to this field and want to look down the road of park and recreation administration in terms of the hard decisions that have to be made in the level of

decision making, the level of responsibility that is now with us in the 1980's and in the future?

CF: I've heard some leaders in the field make some speeches, kind of wringing their hands that the future doesn't augur well for the park and recreation people. Perhaps they're doing that more as to wake them up to be alert to the changes that are coming. To me, I am optimistic. I think the future is bright. I think the need is great, but it means that those of us in this profession, as in any profession, have got to continually prepare to meet the changes that are coming. Indeed they're going to come at a lot faster pace in the next twenty years than they have in the last twenty as we move from an industrial society into a computer information society, as we move from the pyramid form of management organization into more collateral groups, quality control groups, but nonetheless, smaller units. As we move with these people requiring a high degree of technical knowledge and professional knowledge, these impose some great challenges to us [as] to how do we shape and manage this function of public park and recreation services to most effectively and most economically do what needs to be done? In this high-tech, high-touch society though, they say that the technology is here, that there are those people that could take the computer and go home and work at home. They could crack into the office and just punch the buttons. The prediction is that people are going to need other people. They want the socialization and that is either going to have to come in their leisure time or we make special provisions for it in the work experience. I don't know exactly what the future is going to bring, but I think if you're alert and alive and are flexible and willing to change, that I think it's bright for those of us who want to continue.

DL: I asked earlier about unique facilities, but really you have something unique in your structure or your process whereby you worked with communities and in properties that were outside your county boundaries. Most of us think a boundary is sacred. How did you bring that about?

CF: That's a very interesting question, and it came about with the purchase of land. One large piece of land next to a county, Carver County, in which, by our enabling legislation, we were authorized to make this acquisition. The County Board of that county--and this was back in 1966 or '67--informally told us, "We think the park reserve would be a good idea here, but officially we're not going to give you any blessing on this at all." In fact, we bought it and then we got a lawsuit from them. The lawsuit on the number of allegations charged that the legislature had given the Park District, through its enabling legislation, unconstitutional powers. That was basically the test. The district court throughout all of those, and in fact the attorney representing us, brought out that some thirty-plus states had Supreme Court decisions where one jurisdiction could own land in another jurisdiction to accomplish the recreation need or purpose. They also cited the number of Supreme Court decisions that had been made. So, when it came down to acquiring other lands when opportunities came, it wasn't that we were trying to move into another jurisdiction so much, it was simply that an opportunity was there and that we seemed to be the most logical one to implement it. We seized it and weren't always loved for doing it in the other jurisdiction but we were the only ones to do it. If we hadn't done it, it wouldn't be done.

DL: I observed that your relations were very friendly. That they discovered you were quite an asset to their territory.

CF: You're coming along in later years. [All laughing] But one exception in the county directly to our south, Scott County, they came to us and said, "We have applied for some state aid. It looks like we're going to get it, but we don't have the money to make the match that's required. Can you help us?" After carefully studying the situation, we made the recommendation to our Board that if this area was lost, it would be a bigger loss to the people in the south end of [Hennepin] county than it would be to Scott County with its forty-thousand population. On that basis, we entered a joint powers agreement and it really was at their invitation that we created this. This has been revised twice to the point

that now we are functioning effectively as a two-county system through a joint powers agreement down in that county and it's working out very well.

DC: Clif, one of the significant things that I recall about the Park Reserve District as is the relationship with private foundations and money-raising by private citizens had to do with the nature centers groups. Can you talk a little bit about the foundation and the impact it's had on the Park Reserve District?

CF: Don, you know, there's really two. The first thing, after I heard from Rodell Owens down in Peoria, Illinois about the foundation that they had and how that foundation had helped the Peoria Park System with an acquisition that they were threatened to lose, I came back to our Board Chairman and said, "You know, we need a foundation. We need a ready reserve here." Fred King, long-time Chairman of our Board, got to work. He said it's a good idea and along with Bill Baker and Larry Haeg, they formed the Metropolitan Park Foundation which has done some remarkable things. Maybe time doesn't permit to tell all those stories, but they have helped us immeasurably in different ways plus some other jurisdictions. The Nature Center came about in a little different way. One of the towering cities and leaders in our community had served on the National Audubon Society National Board and became imbued with the idea that he would like to see started in his home community a prototype nature center that would have as its major objective the education of children in to man's relationship and understanding man's relationship with nature and the significance of the natural world on man's welfare. He found that he would have no problem raising the money to build that nature center, but [didn't know] where to put it. Then we created a relationship with them in which we leased to them one acre of ground with a fifty-year lease in the Carver Park Reserve. The Park Reserve District agreed to do all the site work and develop the site work. They would develop the nature center. They'd staff it [and] program it. The intent was to not have to run it more than five years. Their intent was to turn it over to the Park Reserve District, which they did after about, I think it was two and a half, three years of operation. They were satisfied that we had arrived at

sufficient maturity where we could take it over. But that was a very unique thing that really set our whole nature education, nature recreation program at least ten years ahead of where it would have been had we not had the private capital assistance.

DL: I know you have an extensive nature center system. Was that the first?

CF: That was the first.

DL: How did you go on?

CF: What Goodrich Lowry did--he was the leader I spoke of earlier--was to form the Metropolitan Nature Centers, Inc. They raised more money than they needed to build the first nature center. So, the second nature center came in another park reserve in which they put up part of the money and we adapted a residence there. The third one came in another area which they paid and raised a little more money, a little over a hundred thousand dollars to build the third one. Then they did an interesting thing. They had met their full commitment to all of their contributors and then one of the things that they did which is very interesting, they said, "We're asking you once. We're not coming back year after year. We want to demonstrate what a prototype nature center will do, its efficacy and so forth." Then they took themselves out of business. It doesn't really often happen when they reach their goal, their objective, that people fold their tent and silently steal away. But that's what they did. Now the interesting [thing] is the corporate community appreciated the integrity of meeting their objective. This has made it a better condition for the Metropolitan Park Foundation in subsequent giving.

DC: Clif, based on the background you provided today and the years of experience you've had in the field, could you say a little about what you consider to be the future of the park and recreation profession as you look ahead?

CF: Well, back a few moments ago I commented on the future which to me, I think the future is bright. I think the future offers great exciting things. I don't know how many years are going to be left to me, both working as well as just living, but I look forward to the changes that are coming. [I] just hope that the young people who are coming around,

in fact, I have a lot of confidence that they're going to hack it, they're going to make it go. I hope that any contribution that I have made through the Park Reserve District or other places is leaving them a legacy that's solid and good to build upon.

DL: Clif, it's been a pleasure to help interview you. Don shares in that pleasure and we agree with the title of the program, you are a legend in the park and recreation profession. Thank you very much.

CF: Thank you.

Paul Lindholm
Former Commissioner for Three Rivers Park District
Formerly, Hennepin Parks, and
Hennepin County Park Reserve District
Narrator

Judy McDowell
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer

October 21, 2008
at the Bank of Maple Plain
Maple Plain, Minnesota

JM: The focus of our interview is the history of the Park District, specifically Mr. Lindholm's role on the Board and his involvement with the early decisions and focus of the Board.

Thank you so much, first of all, for doing this.

PL: You're welcome.

JM: I want to find out a little bit about your background so, tell me where you grew up and a little bit about your education.

PL: Okay. I was born in Watertown, Minnesota which is just twelve miles west of here. My father was in the bank in Watertown and he lost his job during the crash of 1929. He was without a job for a couple of years and was eventually hired to be cashier of the bank here in Maple Plain. That was about 1931. So that's where I grew up. I think when I came to Maple Plain, I was either seven or eight years old. That's how we started out in Maple Plain. My father was in the bank here until 1982, or 1981 when he died, and he'd been here since 1931 to 1981. So he was here fifty years. When he died, I had been hired by the...well I was with the Northwestern National Bank in Minneapolis. I started out as a teller in 1948 and was there until 1982 until after my father died. Then I moved out here and became part of the bank and Chairman of the Board. I've been here since eighty-two, however that measures up and, well, that's kind of a thumbnail sketch of what...

JM: It sounds like there's a lot of stories in there, too.

PL: Oh there's a lot. We built over on County Road 19, right across from where Baker Park started. And there's so many stories about [laughing] about Lake Independence and Baker Park and you could go on and on forever about some of the things that happened in those days.

JM: So your first introduction to the park system was Baker Park, is that right?

PL: Actually it was called Sandeen's Resort and it was owned by two gentlemen who were not [from] here. They were from Minneapolis and they rented that part, along the lake, as Sandeen's Resort. They were there for many years. They had cottages on the lake side where the park is now today. They maybe had about twenty to twenty-five different little cottages that people rented and he had a great big building with hotel rooms in it. Every Sunday, Mr. Sandeen would have chicken and dumplings and mashed potatoes and I think it was twenty-five cents or fifty cents a person for that. My father used to take my mother and my brother and I down there for a Sunday dinner. Mr. Sandeen was also a member of the Board of Directors [of the bank] here in Maple Plain. We grew up in that era and the picnic grounds [were] open to anybody that wanted to use it. Years later we had a chamber of commerce type of thing, where we had races on the water down there. We had the Shriner's come in with all of it. It was really exciting back in those days.

JM: And a focal point for the community, it sounds like.

PL: Very much a focal point. There were at least three or four little areas around the lake that rented cottages and so forth and it was very active. Mr. Sandeen had a great accent, a Swedish accent [JM laughs]. Everybody laughed about it because he had so many good stories to tell and he told with that accent and it was really a great time to be alive. In addition to running the resort, he also had cattle, pigs and chickens and all that sort of stuff. He raised the chickens for the Sunday dinners that they used to have.

JM: Wow, local food!

PL: Yes, and at one time he also had an apple orchard down there. I actually bought his farm.

JM: Oh, really?

PL: I live on Lake Independence. I'll show you here on this right here [pointing to map]. That little piece that you see right there. I live in Medina. See, this is the county line.

JM: You're right in that little notch right there.

PL: I am in that notch. It's four acres and we bought that around 1960. We built in 1967 and have been there ever since.

JM: Right. I know exactly where that is. Okay. Well, are you right on the border of the park? Right on the line?

PL: Right on the border. I'm in that little square in there, that is our home and it's in Medina and the neighbor is in Independence. We've just had a fabulous life there.

JM: Fabulous life there, that's great.

PL: Just fantastic.

JM: Well, I know exactly where you are because my first job was at Baker Park Reserve so I used to come down there. There's the beach there, that connects to the campground and so I know exactly where that is. Well, as you're telling this, I'm thinking that you probably have the longest relationship with the Park District because you lived right there and you grew up right here.

PL: Yes, 1931-1932. That's a long time.

JM: Yes, well I didn't know that you were such a rich resource of stories. I may have to come back for some more. I'm sure you've got plenty [laughter].

PL: Oh there's so much.

JM: Good. Okay. We really need to start talking about the Park District and your involvement on the Board of Commissioners.

PL: Well, it really didn't start out on a good note either because when I first heard that Morris Baker had given the land for a park, I said, "You know, that really is going to hurt our school district. We're not going to be able to sustain a good school district if we're going to have all of this non-profit and not pay taxes." I was really against it. I thought

this is just terrible. We're going to have all this tax-free land around here. And I found out that I was wrong. Because I'd had arguments with some of the people, about tax-free. But I changed my mind. And the fellow who preceded me from this District was a man by the name of Don Crouley. He was also my boss at Northwestern National Bank. He had a lot to do with my attitude on that. He said, "Paul, you're not thinking right. This is going to be a great thing for Maple Plain and for all of the land around there and it's going to grow." He was a well-known guy. He lived out here on Mudd Lake. It's right in here [pointing at map]. What is that lake?

JM: Lake Robina.

PL: Robina. That was his wife. He went from here to Minneapolis every day to work and so did I. I worked for him, of course, on the bank department. So anyway, I changed my mind about the whole park thing. When Don Crouley had finished--he started in 1957 and he got off in 1966--he says, "I don't want to be there anymore, I've done my duty. Why don't you run?" So I did. I was elected because there was nobody running against [me]. Nobody knew about it, nobody cared about it. Mr. Crouley suggested that I run and kind of pushed me. So I ran and he was happy with that. He knew Bill Baker, Ed Chapman, Larry Haeg, Jim Wilkie and Max Winter. He knew all of those guys from his work that he did at Northwestern Bank. He was one of the top officers there and I actually took his place [on the Board of Commissioners]. When I look at this list here and the number of people that I knew--I checked them off here--there's only about, I'd say five or six of them that I did not know. There again, the roots are pretty deep in being part of this community. I've always been active in Maple Plain. You know, a lot of people say, "Gee whiz, you're eighty-three. When are you going to quit doing things like that?" And I say, "Well, who knows?"

JM: Right. Well, if you love it too, which it sounds like you do.

PL: Well, we were just thunderstruck the other day when we found out that those buildings up there where we used to have the meetings [were gone]. I went by there, yesterday or

the day before, but I looked over there and I couldn't believe it, absolutely couldn't believe it, and I'm sure you feel the same way.

JM: Oh I do, I do, yes. So you decided to run because Don Crouley said you should think about doing that.

PL: He says, "You belong to that community so you really ought to do it." So I did, but I lost [when] I ran for a third term. I think the terms were four years or three years?

JM: Well, you served from 1966 to 74, is that right?

PL: Yes.

JM: Okay. So that would be eight years.

PL: Eight years, it was four years.

JM: Yes, so it must [have been] four year terms.

PL: So I ran for a third term and I was kind of getting sick of doing it, but I said I'd do it because some of the guys on the Board said "we need you." There was a guy that lived down on the lake down there that was really upset with the park, with the whole metropolitan park system. He got somebody else to run and I should have stayed home and campaigned but I didn't. I went to Hawaii for a vacation and I came back and I got beat [Laughing]. The guy that beat me; he became elected but he wasn't involved at all. No sense in mentioning names, but nevertheless, I was off and he was in and that was it.

JM: So when you were first on the Board, that was in sixty-six, and that was about nine years after the Park District was formed. What were you personally hoping to accomplish?

PL: Well the number one thing was acquisition. Clif French, when he came on board to be the Superintendent, he had a mission. He knew what his mission was because he'd been in that business in Edina. He was the director of the parks in Edina and so when they hired him out here, his mission was to make this grow. Each one of us on the Board, we're supposed to get involved as best we could. Most of us had jobs to do, so we couldn't spend a lot of time. Fred King had retired, I think, from Farmers and Mechanics Bank, so he had a lot of time to spend in helping the Superintendent. He seemed to have the same mission

that Clif French had, and there are many stories about him. I can't remember all the stories, but there were people that knew that when Clif French was coming they were going to get out the shotgun and make sure that....there's a story about some lady up there in Elm Creek. They were going to take her land by eminent domain. When he came out there, she was standing in the doorway with her shotgun saying, "You're not taking my place." And he got to know her pretty well and eventually we acquired her property and she was okay.

JM: She was okay with it.

PL: Yes, but it took a long time. This fellow that lived down here and still lives down here on Lake Independence who worked for the Star Tribune, he was absolutely dead-set against the park and dead-set against eminent domain. But I think he grew the same way as everybody else to know just how good the park was for our community and for the people that lived around here. He's very active now in helping to work on this, on Baker Park. They have a committee, or a group, I can't think of the name...who live on Lake Independence. They meet several times a year and try to make everything better because the lake has really gone to hell in a hand-basket because of all the weeds that have come in. So he, along with others, are working hard to try and get the lake back to the clean water type of program.

JM: So what was the general feeling of this community and other communities where we were putting in parks, like Hyland and Carver and Elm Creek? What was the general feeling?

PL: Well, I think there was divided opinion. Obviously, those that were opposed, feeling that it was encroachment upon their God-given right to be able to use those lakes the way they wanted to. Lake Rebecca is up here and it's totally owned by the Park and they can allow things to happen or they can shut things down if they want to. You couldn't do that in Baker Park because [the Park District] only owns a portion of it. When you think about the Lowry Park [Carver Park Reserve] over in Carver County, they did a great job of acquiring that land from the people who were developing it, particularly Bill Baker and Goodrich

Lowry. You know, they had foresight, they had a feeling that they were doing something great, and God bless them for that because it's turned out to be, as everybody knows, really something great. But Clif French, he had a focus that just wouldn't quit. I got a kick out of Dave Durenberger because he was a good solid guy and he did a good job as [Chair of the Board], and of the whole metropolitan park system.

JM: You talked about a few people and I know that you made your checklist of all the people that you knew, which is pretty impressive.

PL: Boy, it really is [laughs].

JM: I was looking through that yesterday, and I realized that you served with a number of people who were on the first Board as well so they must have been serving the entire time. Fred King and Larry Haeg had so much to do with the legislation going through in the beginning.

PL: Correct.

JM: So what were your Board meetings like? Did you meet every two weeks, is that how you [often] were meeting?

PL: Oh I think it was more like once a month, and then if there were committees to meet in between times when Clif was out buying land, those committees would meet more often. It started out with Larry Haeg being the chairman, the president, and of course, he was head of WCCO and he didn't have time to do all of these things. Bill Baker was a very interested guy in downtown real estate in Minneapolis. He and his father and brother, they had buildings downtown and they just didn't have time to spend doing all these things, so they had to give the responsibility to somebody like Clif and his staff. Clif was the guy that put everything together and had to work at it. He took a lot of flack from the people that he got involved with in terms of buying park land. But, you take the names of that first Board group, Bill Baker, Ed Chapman, Don Crouley, Lawrence Haeg, Jim Wilkie, Max Winter, who was a sports guy in Minneapolis, Russ Zakariasen from Excelsior, Roger Peterson, I didn't know him, and Fred King and O.J. Bronstad. Those guys had been involved from the get-go

and some of us got to know those people just by the fact that when they had special events, they would invite them along. When I got on [the Board] in 1966, I served with some of those people for a year or two. At the time that they started this, there were elected officials from each of the districts, and I think there were maybe five districts. Then, there were a couple that were appointed. Then the City of Minneapolis, because at one time they were running [Baker] park when there wasn't another hierarchy of people, and some of these guys like Jack Jorgensen, who's the other guy, John Pike, Jim Rice, they were politicians from the City of Minneapolis. So, we got to interplay with them a little bit. They weren't real active people in it. They were there because they had to have somebody from the City representing Minneapolis, and they were it. As I remember it, they didn't come to a lot of the meetings, but they were members of it. They tacitly agreed [that] this was a good thing and, you know, that's the way it was. After that, then we got George Ludcke and Edwin Rapacz, Doug Pearson, and Anna Rae Redpath, she was a Vice Chairman for one or two years. She was Mayor of Eden Prairie, I believe, and then she ended up serving [on the Park District Board]. So, we got to know each other a lot. But then, you kind of lose touch with everybody after you serve for eight years. By that time you're getting a little bit tired of doing it. We got to know these people and they were great people and we interplayed with them. But the focus was going out and getting more land and...

JM: Was there an urgency to that, too?

PL: Yes, there was. You know, I never really thought an awful lot about it, but you could tell that we were not planning it. We had [John] Sunde and we had [John] Christian and those guys that were out there trying to get the thing going, like buying the golf course out here [in Baker Park Reserve]. That was a special thing, especially for golfers, and it's a great golf course. I wasn't there when they acquired it, but they really did a super job of acquisition. The focus was "let's get as much as we can", and of course, I forget how many acres it is. Is it twenty-five thousand acres?

JM: I think we're up to twenty-six thousand acres now.

PL: Twenty-six thousand acres.

JM: Yes. There was a period of time, I think in 1966 when you started, the Park District owned eleven thousand five hundred acres, something like that and today we own over twenty-six thousand. The focus was acquisition. You were just trying to acquire as much as possible and I'm sure, while you still could get those large chunks of land.

PL: Yes, that's really what they went after, you know, like the ski area down in ...

JM: Hyland?

PL: Hyland Park. Then the big acquisition in Carver County was pretty big and [Lake] Rebecca is pretty big in terms of land. Carver Park, that was huge, that was huge, and Hyland-Bush Lake and Murphy-Hanrehan.

JM: Right. It looks like you were trying to get these big chunks of land, a thousand to two thousand acres or so. Were you around when they started focusing on the smaller parks, the regional parks?

PL: No.

JM: Not so much, okay.

PL: Not really.

JM: Okay. Because that became a secondary focus.

PL: Yes, it came afterwards. And Clif, you know, eventually burned himself out because that's all he was doing. But, he was such a good guy for that and he was able to get things done. You had to marvel at the way he worked and the amount of time that he put in. Then, eventually he moved from the Twin Cities or Minneapolis out here to Rockford or someplace. He actually became a customer of our bank here.

JM: Oh, did he really? [Laughs].

PL: Yes, he'd come in here [laughs] and we always had a chat. He'd come in and make his deposit or whatever he was doing and so I got a chance to see him quite often. Even after he had retired, he kept coming in and I got to know his wife really well. Then eventually he went down to, was it Sedona?

JM: Yes.

PL: In Arizona.

JM: Another person I want to ask you about was Charles Doell. Did you know Charles Doell?

PL: You know, I did not know him well. I knew who he was, obviously, but I didn't know him well. But he was well-known in that field. He was the Director for Minneapolis [Parks].

JM: He was the Director for Minneapolis and then he helped out a lot with the establishment [of the Park District], with the legislation and also worked on our first system plan in 1958.

PL: I think that was all done before I got there.

JM: Okay. Alright. Yes, he's an interesting man. I sent you a copy of the system plan--I think that's what you're looking at there--which was really interesting.

PL: Well, then I had been looking at this in the years that I was there and it was, you know, they had [laughs] that swan, that trumpeter swan thing. They had such a byplay on it, you know. Not too many people knew about it.

JM: The restoration project itself or the refuge?

PL: Well, the refuge, and everything. You kind of [thought], "What the world is that? What are we doing with all this? Why are we spending money?" But it turned out so great. Every day that I go home, I go back this way along here down toward the park and straight ahead where all that water is down in there. Then you'll see at least a couple of pairs of trumpeter swans down there. They're just absolutely gorgeous...and seeing them fly is even more important.

JM: It is great. So, you were on the Board when they started the restoration project then.

PL: Yes.

JM: Because I know that that was a big deal.

PL: I can't think of the guy's name that had a mission in getting that.

JM: Dave Weaver, was it?

PL: It might have been Dave Weaver, yes.

PL: Another thing that, this is just an off-the-wall type of thing, but I notice here in 1970, they put in some cross-country skis.

JM: Right. Well, I think cross-country skiing has been one of the things people certainly enjoy in the Park District with all of the trails that we have. Funding...can I ask about funding? I mean, we have our tax base, so we had money coming from tax revenue, we were getting funding that way for acquisitions. Were you getting funding from the state, too? Do you remember?

PL: Yes, yes. It was always a tenuous time. Orville Freeman apparently was involved in the beginning when the legislation was passed. There was a constant effort to try and get more funding from the state legislature. It became a state legislature type of thing rather than just in Hennepin County, because it obviously serviced more than just Hennepin County. But that was tough. There wasn't a lot of money being spread around in those days. That's I think where Fred King and Larry Haeg and Bill Baker were [successful] as the people that spearheaded that whole effort, because they knew the legislators.

JM: I'm curious about this now, was there the fear that there wouldn't be enough funding? Is that the reason that Larry Haeg and Fred King started the Metropolitan Park Foundation? And the Nature Center Foundation? Was there an urgency behind it, like "we have to get this land and if we don't have the money to get it, we'll figure out a way to do that?"

PL: You know, I really don't know the answer to that. I know, Goodrich... [Lowry Nature Center], over in Carver County, was obviously outside of Hennepin County, so it really became more of a state project than a Hennepin County project. And I don't think they had enough money from the Hennepin County. They had so many roads and other things going on that they didn't have money to spare to put into some of these projects. That's why, I think that's why, they went to the legislature for funding. I don't think, I'm not positive about that, I really wasn't part of that.

JM: Okay. Because it sounded like funding was a big issue and they were going to the state to get that [funding]. But also, I know that they had started these two foundations in order to quickly acquire the land, but with the idea that they would turn it over to the Park District and then the Park District could actually afford it.

PL: Yes, I guess I just don't know - there's some things you remember and some things you don't. That's one of the ones I don't remember.

JM: Do you remember anything about the Metropolitan Council, the Parks and Open Space Commission, that was what Dave Durenberger was serving on? I think that all came together just as you were ending your term. I believe that 1974 was when they signed the bill for the whole Metropolitan Regional Park System.

PL: When did Dave come on the...

JM: Dave came on the Board, in seventy-three I believe.

PL: Seventy-three.

JM: Yes. And, I know that there were numerous attempts to try to create the Regional Park System.

PL: Yes, right. Well, he came just one year before I left. Because I left in seventy-four.

JM: But do you remember, I know that there was some feeling that the Park District should be regional, that it would extend beyond Hennepin County and go into Carver County and Ramsey County and become the main system. But, then that didn't really seem to work because some cities and counties didn't want that and there was a lot of politics ...

PL: Well, like Wright County, I think they had some projects going out there and we helped them with that. I can remember they didn't have any money really to do a lot of things, but we helped them, I think, to buy some land and also to get the park started because there's a regional park of some kind in, is it Beebe Park?

JM: Right. Beebe Park, yes. I think we had a Joint Powers Agreement with (Wright County) at some point, too.

PL: I think, yes, I think that was part of the whole thing. But we really didn't expand beyond Wright County, Carver County, what's the other one down there?

JM: Scott County.

PL: Scott County. Most everything was pretty much centered around that.

JM: A little bit in Anoka County too with the Coon Rapids Dam project.

PL: Right. Right. I think there was more, I don't remember this that well, but I think there was more opposition to that.

JM: Okay, alright. In this system plan here, published in 1969, there was some notation about land ownership is not enough and that the Park District needs to restore the lands to native character and also to develop recreation areas. Did you get involved with park development at all? Such as deciding where picnic areas were going to be and campgrounds and cross-country ski trails?

PL: Well, I told you about this nice, great big, white hotel that was down here in Baker Park. I was the only one that opposed taking that down out of seven or eight members of the Board. I can remember when this came up and Clif, reluctantly, for whatever reason, whether it was out of deference to me, he said, "We can't afford to have this place. The upkeep on it is far superior to anything that we need to do that sort of thing. We really don't want to get into the commercialness." And I said, "I think you'll learn to regret this." It should have been put on the National Register. Anyway, we had quite a good conversation about it. I don't know who made the motion, but this just kind of gives you some idea.

JM: So, they wanted to take it down and...

PL: He particularly wanted it down. I don't think he wanted to operate it.

JM: There's such a history here. Looking back on your Board experience, what do you feel was the biggest accomplishment of that time period?

PL: Well, I think, whatever it was that drove us in the beginning to the fact that we didn't think it was a really big deal. It really became a big deal, at least during the time that I was

on there because Clif was one of these guys that was just a driver. He was driven. Everything that he did was done for the purpose of getting the parks done. Now, I don't know whether he had that vision of having parks all over like we've got them, but when he started it was Baker Park and that was it. And somehow or another he was able to convince all of these people, that this was the most important thing that could happen to the land. Because, when we think about the number of people that are here, had we not had these parks, all of these people would be leaving here. They would be going, they would be spending their weekends up north, further north.

JM: And now we've got over twenty-seven thousand acres now and people really have a view into the Park District or into the natural world that they might not have had if people like you and Clif had not been doing this work. Any stories or anything else you want to add that I haven't asked you about?

PL: Oh, I don't [know]. You know, as you sit and talk, things go across your mind.

JM: So, well I've taken up a lot of your time and...

PL: That's okay.

JM: ... its been very interesting and I can tell that there's a lot more stories there, too!

Don Cochran
Former Employee of the Park District
Former Director of Operations
Narrator

Margie Walz
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer

October 16, 2008
at the NRPA Conference
Hilton Garden Inn Hotel
Baltimore, Maryland

MW: Don, tell us, are you originally from Minnesota?

DC: No, from Illinois. I had gone from University of Illinois, where I got my Masters Degree, to Philadelphia to work as an NRPA (National Recreation and Parks Association) intern. I was there until 1966 and I was hired from there.

MW: So, your educational background is then...

DC: University of Illinois-Masters and Southern Illinois University-Bachelors in Parks.

MW: What made you decide to go into the Parks and Recreation profession?

DC: My major was in natural resources, primarily in biology, and I was thinking about going into wildlife management. Along the way, I started hearing about recreation and parks and I liked the idea of park management, so I moved that direction. Southern Illinois did not have a parks curriculum so I made up my own as I went. I took a lot of courses in horticulture, forestry, etcetera, and built a parks background. Then in graduate school, I moved more that direction.

MW: How did you come to the Park District? You said you were an intern for NRPA and then, how did you find out about the Park District, how did you come here?

DC: Well, they apparently found out about me. I think Clif French, the Superintendent at the time, made a connection with the University of Illinois who had been part of placing me with Bob Crawford in Philadelphia and also with Harold Schick who was the Superintendent of Fairmount Parks. I got a call from Bob Crawford's office saying that [Clif] wanted to meet with me, would I be interested in an interview for a job in Minnesota? So, I drove to

Wheeling, West Virginia. I remember it well. I think I had twenty dollars in my pocket, barely enough gas to get there. I met Clif, and they stuck me in a bunk somewhere in Wheeling. I had breakfast with him the next morning and we talked about this and that, and at the end of the interview, he offered me the job to come to Minnesota. So I went back to Philadelphia to tell my wife that we were going to Minnesota [laughs], which she had no idea where that was.

MW: What was your first job with the Park District and in what year were you hired?

DC: 1966. I started in June of sixty-six. I think the title Clif gave me was Administrative Specialist or Administrative Assistant, something like that. It was a catch-all job. We made it up as we went. I was basically doing anything he wanted done. We were so small that everybody had to do something.

MW: So, your job responsibilities were scattered. What were your first impressions of the Park District? It was new.

DC: Well, I had no clue coming in other than my meeting with Clif. I didn't know anything about the Park District. But I did talk to several people about Clif that I could find out. I went to the University of Illinois and they led me to some other people. By the time that I had firmed up my decision to go there, I had a sense of who Clif was. I was hearing about a brand new system, which was what Clif described to me. He also talked about what he wanted to do with this park system. It was exciting to hear for me. I mean, here I am, not exactly a kid, because I had gone to the service before I went to school, so I was a little older than the average graduate. But it was all new to me in terms of the profession. I realized at that time that this was a big deal in terms of the opportunities that were there for me, and the field of endeavor was exciting. So, as I listened to Clif and then listened to others, I got this mental picture of this metropolitan park system that was sitting within this county which I hadn't yet seen. It was brand new and it was finding its way. It was mostly about land acquisition and that proved to be pretty much the case. When I got there and got into the job a bit and started understanding it, some of the duties that Clif assigned to

me were political. I started doing some work pretty quickly with the legislature, and then I also got into some land acquisition. The program of acquisition in the next two to three years just kept accelerating. We were growing on that end in terms of banking a lot of acres of land, so I got involved in more of that kind of thing. I also picked up some park management responsibilities at Baker Park and Carver Park. Then, I actually lived my first year in Elm Creek Park in a park house. During my second year, Clif wanted me to go to Carver and live down there. So, we went down there and lived in that park. Carver was just a piece of land at that point. There was nothing there. I worked with the maintenance crew down there, as well as in Baker Park and Lake Rebecca. Then Elm Creek started coming up a little bit. And so that's how I worked my way towards the park management piece of it.

MW: What you're telling me, you recognize that you were there within ten years of the passage of our legislation in 1957. You were there before even our tenth anniversary and just four years after Clif was hired. We wanted to find out more about this early time in the Park District. You've mentioned land acquisition. You were really involved with getting to that twelve thousand acres that we had at that time. How many visitors would you say came to the park in those years?

DC: It was primarily Baker Park, where we had the beach and a campground and picnic area. Also the Hyland Hills ski area. Carver was nothing at that point because we had no facilities. Elm Creek was just land at that time, so Hyland and Baker were really the primary places of operation. Crow Hassan was just a piece of land at that point--we had nothing there as well. So, the summer visits, primarily because we weren't into winter activities in those years, I don't remember numbers, but I would say it was very small because Baker in those years was unimproved. We didn't have much in the way of restroom facilities. We had gravel parking lots and the campgrounds were all gravel spurs and so forth. It was very informal. A lot of people were coming into it, but not in the numbers that it ultimately evolved into.

MW: How about the employees? How many employees did we have and who were some of your colleagues?

DC: Well John Sunde was the very first. When I got there, it was myself and John and Clif. The three of us were the so-called professional people. And then we had Don Olstad who had worked with Clif in Edina. I guess Maintenance Foreman was probably Don's title. I'm not sure how many maintenance [employees] we had. I would guess ten to fifteen. It may have been a few more, but not a lot more. There was an old hotel in Baker Park at that time and we did some maintenance work out of there. We didn't have much equipment to take care of. There were a few trucks and some tractors and mowers, but we were starting to grow. The year that I got there we were starting to move forward in terms of getting more people. Clif realized that he needed to bring in more staffing and start doing something with the parks to get people into them as a way of supporting the acquisition program. It was his idea to get development going, get use and get people knowing the park system and therefore start to develop not only credibility but understanding with the constituency about what [we] are doing. We were having our battles on acquisition in terms of some of the townships and other places where they were not happy about our taking land off tax rolls. We had some real battles going on with some of the townships -- the Mayor, the townspeople, the Town Council, etcetera -- particularly in Crow Hassan. I wasn't there at the time that Carver County sued the Park District over the acquisition in Carver County, but there was an actual lawsuit. I don't know that it ever went to court because it was done by the time I got there. I think it had probably been settled.

MW: Did we have to pay something to them for tax?

DC: Not that I am aware of. I don't think so. It may have gone through a step in the court system and it actually occurred I think a year or two ahead of me. So when I moved down to Carver, I was not particularly welcomed down there, because I was just an extension of that "damn Frenchman" and that's what Clif was known as down in that area for a while.

MW: Speaking of that, describe Clif French. What was unique about his leadership?

[Laughing] Describe him from your perspective.

DC: Clif was a fascinating personality to me. He was a person that you could love and hate. I chose to love him. There were times when we had some great arguments, but we always reconciled because we both understood that we were working for a better [park system] and the silly stuff of brouhahas didn't really amount to much. Clif was great about not carrying grudges towards his staff when we would have disagreements. Clif was a driven individual. He had passion. He had a dream. But more than that, he had a vision and he understood better than anybody how difficult it was going to be. He never allowed himself or any of us to take our eyes off of what was ahead for us in terms of what we were trying to accomplish. Probably the most important thing that happened was Clif's doing, and that was the creation of the policies that guided the development and acquisition of that park system. Charlie Doell did that work and that was concluded just when I got there. I wasn't part of developing the policy, but I was certainly part of understanding and interpreting and following them. It was definitely the most important aspect of Clif's work at that time because he understood that he needed policies to drive forward this huge thing that he was the main person building. He understood that and he had some good advice from some initial Boards. He had some very wise business people.

MW: I want to ask you about those individuals. Tell me about some of the other staff or Board that stood out as an influence in the Park District.

DC: Well, John Sunde clearly. John was the Planner and head of the planning group and the development. At that time, he was just the Planner. John had a wonderful sense of design and more importantly, he understood what Clif was trying to do and he was arm-in-arm and hip-and-hip with Clif. I quickly understood that and got myself into that because I liked John personally and I really respected what he was doing. I used to kid him about "John Sunde roads". The park system still has some of those original roads. If you look at the road going into the Nature Center in Carver Park, you will see a John Sunde design.

And what it is, John taught me, is that you want that landscape to enhance the development and not the development driving over the landscape. And so he blended that road in very nicely. It's a road of curves and we used to kid him all the time saying, "John haven't you ever seen a straight road?" His philosophy was, "I want you to be surprised at every curve." He had that sense of how to shape the land and not intrude upon it. If you look at some of the early developments, the physical developments in the park system, you will see that influence. John, of course, hired landscape architects and engineers who he brought along in that same thinking. Mike Henry was a Landscape Architect from the Minneapolis Park System. He had a great background and an understanding of what we were doing. He was one of the first people that John brought in. Chuck Bellingham was an Engineering Tech, and Tim Marr, Don King. Several of those folks came in under John's tutelage. Unfortunately, John passed away at an early age, but his influence was very strong and I don't think that people have ever given [him] enough recognition for what he did in the park system. He understood the policies and he worked within those policies to try to bring in development in a way that would not be intrusive or take away and would fit in. That was really his concept.

MW: I worked with John for a while, too. This is the first I've ever heard this. This is very much appreciated.

DC: John was an important member of that little team that we had. We laughed a lot about it in those days, as he didn't have a clue as to what I was supposed to do. I figured out what he was doing, but I was still figuring out what I was supposed to do [laughs].

MW: How about any Board members, any other staff and Board members?

DC: Oh, yeah. Don Olstad was another staff member who was in maintenance and an unsung person in the park system. Don, early on in the history of that system, was responsible for a lot of decisions and a lot of things happening in the operations end. [His accomplishments] aren't particularly noted or recognized historically, but he was an important piece. He did a good job hiring staff. [The Park District] had no money, so the

salaries were minimal for people in those days. I think my beginning salary was either sixty-eight hundred or seven thousand dollars and Clif thought that was a lot of money [laughs]. But those guys were important. In terms of the Board members, we had some really strong individuals. There were very successful business people who were helping Clif guide those early years and they were important for Clif because they knew the business. They knew business. They knew money. They knew how to get things done. Clif was not in their mode and they were not in his, but they quickly learned to work with each other. As I remember, the Board meetings were held in two rooms in the County courthouse on the sixth floor.

MW: Is that where your office was?

DC: That was the office and I shared that office with a woman named Evelyn Tourtelotte and another woman whose name I don't remember. The three of us sat in one room behind three desks in there. Clif was in the next room in an office. He had a big desk which then became the Board table. When the five members of the Board would come to his office, that's where the Board meetings were held. And they would gather around Clif, essentially Clif's desk, and that's where the business was done. We did that probably for, I want to say, a couple of years as I remember. Then Clif thought we ought to move and that's when we starting talking about moving to Baker Park. Now John Sunde didn't office with us. John officed out at Baker in the farmhouse, and Clif thought "well okay, we're going to go out there." That's when we started the idea of remodeling and creating an office from the barn. That was an interesting time [MW laughs]. By this time, this is probably three or four years down the road now, I'm trying to remember when the barn was built, but there was Roy Spurzem who was a carpenter that we hired and a couple other fellows. Joe...

MW: Erlandson.

DC: ...Erlandson worked with him. They became the foremen of the barn project. They [were] the only ones that really knew what they were doing. John drew up some plans and we hired an architect and got the office set up. Well, we were all out there slinging nails,

putting shingles on, putting those cedar shakes on that roof. It's a wonder we didn't get killed. Clif insisted that we had to do that. That was the way we were going to save money. So, he had professional staff, maintenance staff, whoever, out there working. That's how the office barn project came along.

MW: Oh my. You know all about our Park District status as an independent agency. Chapter 398, our enabling legislation, established a Park District as our separate government authority with taxing authority. This was, and still is, unique in Minnesota. It's the only one in Minnesota. From your perspective as an employee of the Park District, what worked well with this arrangement?

DC: Well, it facilitated land acquisition because we had an authority that we could implement without having to go to a lot of other places to get approvals. The Park Board at that time, and the Board that I remember as the first Board, there were some previous members that I did not know, but the ones that were there when I came in were Fred King, Bill Baker, Larry Haeg, Russ Zakariasen and John Pike. There were others along the way that I can sort of remember. Alexander Dean was another one and before that was Max Winter. There was one other person with Max and I just can't recall the name. But those five were there for a while and really helped with that law. Larry was a former Senator as I remember, and Bill was a very successful businessman--all of them were in their own right. So, they became the authority that we operated under basically. The land acquisition decisions were always being made at that table in terms of "here's where we're going to go, Clif, this is what we want to accomplish, let's concentrate on this park, that park, etcetera." We had master plans drawn and we were working within prescribed boundaries. We were moving forward. As that moved on in years and the acquisition became more difficult, that authority was more critical. Although it irritated the townships--particularly the up-county and the out-county townships--if we had not had that authority, the park system as known today wouldn't exist.

MW: Did you have to get approval from a city to acquire property within the city?

DC: Not that I...

MW: You had the authority without it?

DC: Let's see. I'm trying to remember. That's a good question because I'm not positive about that, Margie. When we got to Crow Hassan, for example, we had to go up there many times to talk about acquisitions and I don't recall exactly what that process involved. I do think that there was some authorization piece in there that we had to go through, but I'm not remembering it. I do remember that's where some of the fights were, so I think that we did have to [get approval]. I believe that is right. I believe that we did have to get approval and that's where it became very difficult. So that law was critical for us to be able to acquire [property]. As the years went forward, on the acquisition particularly, it was getting harder and harder to get the land. We had owners who did not want to sell and so we had to implement acquisition with eminent domain. That became very controversial. That was a difficult process. It was hard for Clif, it was hard for all of us and it probably philosophically was a major point in my own professional development because I was involved with a lot of those acquisitions where eminent domain became the tool. Eminent domain is an easy word to bandy around, but when you use it, and you know the people that are involved, the farmers [who were] primarily the landowners that we were dealing with, it was more difficult because it became personal. You knew the effect that it was going to have. It was going to stop somebody's farming business, their way of life. It was going to dislocate them from their homesteads. That was serious stuff and it struck me after I got into it. It had a profound effect on me personally in terms of my ability to really comprehend the importance of public land acquisition. I think it was a moment for me where I came to grips with it, understanding how significant these public lands were because I accepted the fact that this was going to be painful for other people. But on the other side, millions of people, literally over the lifetimes of these lands, were going to have opportunities for leisure times. That's how I came to grips with the philosophy of leisure and recreation and outdoor recreation and so forth, and it was a real moment for me. I can

remember well [when I] saw a farmer cry over this. I was involved in an acquisition in Carver and I had been out to see this farmer. He was a dairy farmer and I don't remember his name, but I remember it was a very difficult situation. We were talking. We were negotiating. I was out there on one day and a few days later I learned that he had committed suicide. I don't know what that was about. I never knew, but I just knew what he was going through in terms of the strain of these negotiations and dealing with the fact that he was no longer going to be on his farm. I remember another farmer coming in to get his check after we had purchased [his land], this was in Elm Creek. He came in to get his check for the acquisition and I don't remember the number, but it was over a hundred thousand dollars. I remember him sitting there talking to me and saying, "I know this is going to really sound stupid to you, but I have no idea what I am going to do with this money or with my life." Those were the moments where for me it became more than just a job. It was an understanding that what I was involved in was really important stuff because it had profound effects, both negative and positive, on people's lives.

MW: I want to go back a little bit and talk about your understanding of our relationship with Hennepin County at the time?

DC: Well, depending on who was the Chairman at the time on the Hennepin County Board, the first few years when we were in the Courthouse we got to know the County government and the County personnel people and we had good relationships there, staff-wise.

Politically, it was Clif's deal. He was handling the County Council and obviously we had to have their support to get our budgets and we had to go in there and do the necessary things. There were several Council members out in western Hennepin County whose districts were being impacted by our acquisition. I remember one name in particular, Bud Robb I believe is the name, and he was a Council member from I think the Minnetonka district. I don't know if that's the right name for it, but it was the district of Lake Minnetonka, Wayzata, and so forth. Bud's district was really being hit by some acquisitions, particularly as we started looking at Lake Minnetonka properties. I can't remember how far

his district went, but he had a big district and it was a big impact on those districts. So we had to be careful. We had to maintain good positive relationships with them. For the most part, I'm not sure they knew what to make of us. We weren't really under their control per se.

MW: They didn't appoint our Board then did they?

DC: Not at that time. Later, and I don't remember when that changed, but as I recall some appointments came in. Certainly it was while I was there, but I don't remember. I want to say maybe in the seventies it occurred that the Board expanded and we had appointments from the County Board. John Derus was the Chair of the County Board that I remember. There may have been another person in place. The County Manager was Dale somebody, I can't remember that name. They didn't know what to do with us. They weren't sure quite what we were and we were out there in the other side of the world as far as they were concerned. We had a powerful Board so they had to be respectful of those Board members politically. Those Board members were helpful to us in getting our budgets and so forth. But as the years moved forward, their influence became greater. They wanted a piece of us because all of the sudden we were the biggest landowner in the County. We had these parks their constituents were using and we were outside of all these municipal parks. We were something different and I think as they watched us grow they wanted a piece of the action and the control that goes with that. So they made their moves to bring us in and I don't remember all the political gamesmanship at that time. I got involved with the legislative stuff probably a year or so after I was there. Clif started having me go to the legislature and making contacts and doing whatever, talking to our delegation etcetera. So that's how that piece of my career got going. I did that for many years. I think as we started to grow and the influence grew, the County Council wanted more and so it started to change. The money was not as easy to get. We had to do our battles. We had to fit into county government in a way we hadn't, but we still weren't part of public works. We still had our own maintenance force. We were not part of the Hennepin County

personnel system. We had our own system. At some point after a number of years, I took over the responsibilities for administration. I was doing the so-called personnel stuff. I'm rambling, but that's sort of the relationship.

MW: How about Board members? Do you remember specifically Board members?

Obviously they changed, [got] elected, some were appointed. Did you see differences how they had an effect on the Park District either positively or negatively?

DC: There were very few Board members in the early days who had what I would consider to be negative effects. They were of one mind about the importance of land acquisition. The first several years of the park system's existence, that was the primary focus. Even though we started to bring on some developments, it was still the focus, and it had to be. Everybody knew that it was just a matter of time before land values exploded as the compression of development started and the city started moving out. That was the rush. People like Fred King in particular, Larry Haeg and Bill Baker, those three stand out in my mind as the three people who really, from a Board point of view, really strongly influenced what happened in the park system in terms of its direction and its growth and its development. Fred was a lover of the outdoors and he brought that background. Although he was a banker by profession, he brought his interest, his deep interest, in the out of doors to his work with the commission and with the District. He influenced significantly the directions that we took because he knew people through his own affiliations that he brought into the park system. Goodrich Lowry was one of those people. Goodrich Lowry was the individual who brought the monies for the Lowry Nature Center. Fred King is the person who brought Goodrich in through his contacts and Mr. Lowry was interested in us because he understood our policies. He understood what we trying to become and he wanted to be part of that. He brought some of his private wealth to the District, which resulted in that nature center. Then later, Elm Creek, and then later some dollars for Hyland...

MW: Through the Metropolitan Parks.

DC: ...and Richardson. He was a major factor at that time in the early stages of the system. Fred is also the person who somehow learned about Trumpeter Swans and wanted us to get into the Trumpeter Swan program and be part of the restoration of the Trumpeter Swan. Fred sort of directed us that way and through a variety of networks of people [and] all of the sudden we were into the Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program. At that point, Robley Hunt had been hired. Robley became the head of our natural resources group. I'm wandering around a little bit here, but I don't want to lose my train of thought about the early times and the concepts that were being driven that later resulted in some of the departments in natural resources. We knew that a major factor of our park system was going to be natural resources. But we hadn't gotten to the point of actually conceding that notion in terms of saying, "Okay, let's create a natural resources park." We really weren't there. It sort of grew that direction. It grew through these affiliations of Fred and others who were interested in what we were doing and who was starting to be attracted to us, either through Board members or through Clif, people like the Fish and Wildlife Services. We had contacts into those organizations in particular about the Trumpeter Swans. We got the first birds through Fish and Wildlife out of Montana and all of the sudden we started talking about needing a department. We need a group of people over here taking care of natural resources. So [now] we've got to hire somebody. Well, somehow we found Robley Hunt. We knew that we wanted to get into interpretation. We didn't know exactly how we were going to do that, but we figured we needed to go that direction. The concept then became a reality and we hired Jack Mauritz. I remember the first time I met Jack Mauritz. He was from Wisconsin. We didn't know exactly what we were doing. We sort of had an idea, but it was [only] an idea and Jack was a reality. All of the sudden Jack's saying, "Well, we've got to hire a naturalist." Goodrich Lowry is there with dollars to build a nature center. All of the sudden, we've got a nature center, we've got a staff and now we're talking about a second nature center. So now we've got a strong interpretative program and Robley is saying, "I need more people, so we need to hire more people over here to do wildlife

managements and I've got programs." All of the sudden that became a reality and Robley hires Dave Weaver. Dave Weaver brings in Larry Gillette and that is sort of the way we grew. It wasn't necessarily Clif sitting down and saying "alright, here's the organizational chart for the future." It was not that direct. It was discussions and ideas and arguing and developing and trying this and that. That was what was fun. That was the most exciting time when [we] were creating and bringing people aboard who had ideas and desires and bought into the passion that Clif was delivering constantly.

MW: You were involved. You were there at the time when the idea of regional parks came...

DC: Right.

MW: ...Not just park reserves, but regional parks. Tell us about why we went to the concept of regional parks and how that change in focus happened and what it meant to the organization.

DC: I don't know that I can accurately describe exactly how it arrived, but we realized that the park reserves, with the 80/20 policy that was driving that acquisition, and the development wasn't going to fulfill the needs totally. There were other land acquisition opportunities that should be taken advantage of, particularly if we wanted to capture waterfronts for lakes that were in the Twin Cities area. I'm embarrassed that I can't remember exactly how we drove to that classification and those ideas. I remember talking about the classifications of parks that we were starting to discuss and how we put those acreages on each one. We were moving forward with that concept and I don't remember the years that those occurred. But, I believe that probably Coon Rapids was one of our first regional parks.

MW: I want to ask you about Coon Rapids specifically. After you talk about this a little bit I want to get a little bit of insight into that whole thing with NSP, Coon Rapids Dam, what we were thinking at the time [laughs].

DC: I'm not sure [laughs]. You really wonder don't you? I'm trying to think of the first regional park other than Coon Rapids.

MW: Well, we had Lake Sarah, French, Fish, Eagle, Coon Rapids and Bryant.

DC: Well that group of parks I'll tell an interesting story about. I guess it was at those times it was called French, Medicine Lake...

MW: Medicine Lake.

DC: ...Medicine Lake was an opportunity that we were looking at. At this point, we had decided to push our acquisition inward towards Minneapolis and sort of "fill in the gaps" if you will. If you think back to those times about what was going on in the County, you had the City of Minneapolis and you had Hennepin County with its forty-eight suburbs as I remember and each of those suburbs were expanding. They were pushing outward and land increasingly was becoming more valuable and more difficult, obviously. As we looked inward we knew that if we didn't grab some of those lake fronts we were going to be in trouble. Well, I recall as clear as I can the discussion on Medicine Lake. Clif gathered myself, John Sunde, John Christian, I think Dave Weaver, and possibly Mike Henry. I just can't remember at this point. The discussion was about whether we should buy that property at Medicine Lake. The opportunity was there and Clif said, "I have to go to a meeting, but when I come back I want you to tell me what you think we should do." So, for two hours we argued as hard as we could with each other. We were arguing about if you take those dollars then some of the major projects--like a new maintenance facility and some park development projects that were on the table--were going to be lost because they were going to be deferred significantly. It was a heated argument back-and-forth, back-and-forth. But we concluded [laughs] that we didn't think we should move forward at that time. So, Clif came back and he comes into the room and he said, "Well, what did you decide?" And I don't know who was stupid enough to volunteer [MW laughs], probably me, but we said, "Well Clif, we really think that now we should defer right now and try to get to that later because we just think that we've got these projects that just absolutely are

critical." He didn't even let us [laughs] get the words out, and he jumps up and slams the table and he says, "That is unacceptable!" [laughter]. [He] said, "We cannot lose this opportunity! I don't understand why you would think this way!" And he sat down and preached to us for a long time about these critical needs of acquisition and these other things were simply going to have to wait. Clearly, in hindsight, he was absolutely correct and we were absolutely wrong. That is one of my favorite stories about Clif because it shows his thinking and how critically important it was and how smart he was and how strategic he was in his thinking about how to build a park system. The problem that we were suffering from, from staff in those days, is that we were caught up in all the problems of trying to operate this fledgling system and getting pressure from employees and from users about needs. We were responding and reacting and Clif just didn't worry about that so much. His worry was what it has always been, "I've got to get this land set aside while I can do it." It really goes back to your earlier question about that man and his character. It's hard to think back of all the hours we put in arguing about these things and how trivial they may have seemed to others, but how important they really were. [Also], how really important his thinking was at that time because he never lost sight of what was important in terms of serving the public. That was big stuff back then.

MW: Interesting. So, tell me a little more about Coon Rapids Dam [DC laughs]. One of the things is [that] this goes into the parkland outside of Hennepin County. We went outside of Hennepin County--Carver, Murphy-Hanrehan, Cleary. I'll ask you about that relationship, and Coon Rapids Dam, because we're still dealing with issues on Coon Rapids Dam. Tell us what was the thinking?

DC: Well, Tom Jepson was a Board member who worked for NSP. I'm not going to be able pull all of this up, but that name jumps in my mind, and the opportunity. I'm almost certain that Tom was part of bringing that forward as an idea because they had declared that the Dam was defunct, so to speak, in terms of generating power and they were not going to go forward with that anymore. Their question to us was, "Is there an opportunity here?" Well,

when we looked at it and saw what it represented in terms of recreation opportunities, we thought it was a wonderful opportunity to grab hold of. Hindsight is always a wonderful view. [laughs]

MW: We got two hundred and some acres of parkland with it...

DC: Yes [laughing].

MW: ...and some money [laughs].

DC: Yeah, we got everything we could get. We had to fight for it because Anoka County all of the sudden had us coming over into their backyard. They weren't very happy because they were wondering why they didn't get it and here we were getting land on both sides and we were going to bring people from Hennepin County across the river into Anoka County. We were arguing vice-versa [that they] could do the same thing because we're going to create this walkway and this recreation facility. But, that was really the thinking. It came through NSP as sort of an idea. It grew and we were quite excited about it. As I say in hindsight, you always wonder now whether it was a smart thing in terms of all the money that had to be expended there in the past and in the future. I don't know the situation on the Dam now, but I've always felt that it was a wonderful addition to the park system [in that] regional parks were really intended to serve purposes that the reserves could not. We thought this is a way that we can take development pressure off of the reserves by getting into these regional parks, having more active developments and not be guided by the 80/20, but still push development into those and protect the reserves for what they should be. That was really the concept of it.

MW: How about getting out to Scott County? I know that was a unique situation, different than Carver because that was on the border. Tell us about Scott.

DC: As I remember, there was a piece of property in Scott County along the Minnesota River that came to us through Bill Baker. I'm not positive about this, but there was a duck hunting club that had this piece of property along the river. Blue Lake, I believe, is that the name? I can't...

MW: I can't remember that. That was turned over later on to the Feds.

DC: ...Okay, to the Feds. Alright, so I think it was Blue Lake.

MW: Wilkie?

DC: Yes, Jim Wilkie was the other person. And Jim Wilkie I think had been a Board member as I can't remember now but...

MW: I think so...

DC: ...Jim Wilkie was a big part of that as well. Jim Wilkie later brought us into the other park that came from the private...what was the name of that?

MW: Cleary.

DC: Cleary. Yes. So we got this first piece of property and it bordered Scott. Then that opened the idea when Cleary, which was a private employee park for Continental...

MW: Continental Can.

DC: ...Continental Can Company and that family decided, and what I don't remember is that Wilkie, I think that's Wilkie, wasn't it? Wasn't Wilkie in that family?

MW: I'm not sure about that.

DC: I don't remember. I just remember, I think it was. Yes, I'm almost sure it was. They proffered the idea of giving that to the system and Scott County was not happy about it because again, off the tax rolls, and the idea of Hennepin County being in Scott County, "why was this happening?" There was a man who, and I can't remember his last name, he was the Director of Parks in Shakopee.

MW: George Muenchow.

DC: Yes, George Muenchow. George Muenchow helped us a lot. Even though he was in Shakopee and not in that area, he was a factor in Scott County. He helped us, sort of behind the scenes, make this work. There was a lot of effort by Clif and others with Scott County Board. This was when John Christian was there and John spent a lot of time working on this relationship as well. We picked up that land because again, it was an opportunity of a large piece of property. I forget how many hundred acres were involved,

but it had waterfront and a golf course and it had opportunities that we thought would be very helpful in the mix of regional parks serving the broader region. Now, at that time in history as I recall, we were starting to move towards the Metropolitan Parks Authority. The Scott County situation became really important in that whole mix, because that then led to Murphy-Hanrehan. That was a huge acquisition for us to pick up Murphy-Hanrehan. Again, [that was] very controversial because a lot of folks didn't like the idea of us being down there taking the land off the tax rolls and so forth. By this point in time, land was becoming more valuable and tax rolls were a big deal in tax revenues.

MW: [Do you] remember the Scott County-Three Rivers Joint Powers agreement? How did that come? Did that solidify that we were cooperating--the Park District and Scott County?

DC: Right. [When] we entered in, it was still Hennepin County at that point, not Three Rivers. It was still Hennepin County Park Reserve District and we entered into that agreement. It's been so many years since I've seen the agreement I don't recall it.

MW: '75 [1975].

DC: As I remember, it laid out the mutual responsibilities. It dealt with the matters of cost of operation. Obviously, Scott County residents had access to the properties as did other residents. As I remember, they put some operating dollars in and we were doing the acquisitions through our dollars. That was an unusual agreement to be struck and there was a lot of really good thinking going on at the level of the Scott County Commissioners. That was a very rural county at that time. I'm sure it's not that way any longer, but at that point it was very rural and [there was] a lot of farmer influence on that Scott County Board. Again, we were taking land and that went down hard with some folks. But, there [were] some people who could think into the future and understood the idea that we were trying to get this land when we could for the benefit of the public.

MW: So, from a governance relationship that worked well then.

DC: It worked well at that time. It was not to say it was without its moments, because there were hard moments. There were influences coming from the Metropolitan Council. They had their, the Metropolitan Council, the park at the Met, what is it called?

MW: Metropolitan Regional Park System.

DC: Regional Park Authority and the Chairman of that was Elliott.

MW: Perovich.

DC: Perovich. Elliott was a very strong-minded person. It was the first time that I saw Clif up against a personality that was similar to his. They were both driven personalities, stubborn, but both committed to a like cause. The only thing that made it work was that common ground. Elliott was a political person. I remember his background. I think he was either a principal or an educator and politically he got onto this Council and became its Chair. There were some times when we had some struggles with that Council because of the personalities. Clif, at that point in time, probably was, I'm not sure how to say it, but it seemed to me that he was not as willing at that point to compromise as he was later. He held to his principles so tightly that sometimes it became a fault.

MW: His principles for the Hennepin County Park Reserve District?

DC: For the Hennepin County...

MW: ...as opposed to the regional park system?

DC: No, it was the matter of "we've got to have" and of making sure that we had the monies to do what we thought was critical to do. They *were* important to do, but there were other things in that seven-county organization that were also important. But Clif, unfortunately, I think unfairly to some degree, was criticized by some of those on the Metropolitan Council level because of his unwillingness and his demand for serving our needs--not staff needs, but constituency needs. He would get at cross purposes at times with Metropolitan Council staff who were trying to serve other interests as well. It wasn't a bad time, it was just a time when you looked at the evolution of the park system and it was

just a different moment in time in terms of our relationships with a whole different body that we had not dealt with.

MW: Now, Dave Durenberger had something to try to create some compromise in there and I know he ended up on our Board.

DC: Yes.

MW: What did you see happen?

DC: Well, David was the head of the

MW: Parks and Open Space Commission.

DC: Dave forged this group and Dave was a peacemaker and Dave was a diplomat. But he was also a strong advocate for the idea of parks and open spaces and was a protector and a very smart guy. He eventually found his way to our Board and that was a whole other history under David. He found the relationship with Clif that worked. Clif had a lot of respect for David. As a result of that, peace was made in a good way and David was able to help us move forward and get through some of the hurdles that we were experiencing. Clif found somebody who he not only respected, he liked David very much. David was younger than Clif and so there was an interesting relationship there that grew and lasted for Clif's lifetime really. It was a very good relationship. From those of us who were working with Clif and watching Clif and watching Dave, it was a good time because we knew that we had an ally, but we also knew that Clif respected David. They had their moments, but it was never anything of a negative nature. David was a big factor in the lifetime of the park system. It's interesting for me as I look back at those days and [now] sitting here talking about it and thinking about it from the time that we started this park system as a group. It's an interesting picture of history and I commend you guys for doing this. I hope you're going to interview people with better memories than mine.

MW: [Laughs] You're doing well, Don.

DC: I think it's a unique place and it was in a unique time. As I think about the history as it unrolled from when I joined in 1966 to now, to watch what has happened, it's really an

incredible story that is being told through these history interpretations. I think that it is an unusual situation and I hope the people of Hennepin County and the metropolitan area really appreciate what has happened here as a result of a force of a few individuals at the beginning, but [also] many individuals over the life [of the Park District], people like Dave Durenberger. You know, you had the Larry Haegs and the Bill Bakers at one period and then you had Chuck Pihl and these other folks coming in with Dave at different times and different commissioners who all brought different strengths and weaknesses to the system and influenced it both positively and negatively as it grew. It's really an interesting look at it. It was an interesting place.

MW: What did you all think about the Metropolitan Regional Park System coming in? You've talked about some conflict with Clif there. From a staff perspective you had this entity, but there was also some funding from that entity if I remember. How did that impact our funding, I mean your ability to acquire?

DC: As I remember, that funding was land acquisition funding primarily. The operating dollars were primarily our own. It was an unusual situation for us because all of the sudden we were dealing with another party outside of the system, outside of the county, trying to get our dollars. Conceptually we understood it. We understood what it was trying to do on a seven-county basis. I quite frankly thought that whole concept of metropolitan government was fascinating, that it was brought into the seven-county area and provided the broad services of sewer and so forth. I thought it was a wonderful idea. I was caught up with that and thinking that it was a positive thing. I guess I would say that even though we were not able to always get what we wanted, sometimes we were not very patient with why others got this or that because we thought we were more important [MW laughs] and our programs were more important than any other people's.

MW: Nothing has changed. [Laughter].

DC: But I think the concept was very sound. Marty Jessen, as I remember, was working in Metropolitan Council at that point. That's how I got to know Marty, through there, and of

course through the Parks and Recreation Association. Marty was the staff person that we worked with in that program. We had some interesting times. I think the concept was strong. I think overall it helped us. I think it helped the regional park concept in particular across the seven counties and I think the seven county region is better because of that.

MW: I understand one of the visions was to have a bigger park authority and do you remember why? Or have any feeling for why that didn't happen? Was it just the parochialism of each of the units that could have been affected by it?

DC: You know, I don't remember, Margie, I'm sorry. When you said that it sort of sparked a memory. I'm not sure I'm correct on this, but I think at one time there may have been a discussion about them [Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission] becoming an operating agency. As I recall, I don't think that was supported, primarily because the operating agencies at that time in the seven counties were not supporting it because it was seen as a take-over sort of a move. I haven't thought about that since I was working there so I am not sure about that.

MW: I think that's pretty much what I read.

DC: Okay.

MW: We always talked about this was the era of acquisition. I know you were there in the beginning of the area of development. Tell us about that transition between the era of acquisition to the era of development.

DC: It was very gradual. Acquisition was just pell-mell in terms of the activity. It was driving everything that Clif did. In the early years, that's what we did as well. John was laying out master plans and creating plans for these new parks, but they were primarily boundary descriptions. [We were] using roads and so forth as our natural boundaries wherever we could. We always tried to acquire to a hard line such as a road because we just thought that was smart and it proved to be a really smart move later on. One story that I don't want to forget because I think it's a unique part of the history of Hennepin County, is that in acquisition, one of the things that we were required to do--because we

were using federal dollars, we were getting grants from HUD, and through the federal government--was to relocate people. And so, Clif said, "Okay, you're going to do the relocations." I had no idea what the word meant [MW laughs] and I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "We're going to buy this land and so these farmers are going to move and you're going to move them to wherever they're going to go. They're going to get federal assistance and your job is going to be to make sure that happens." So I get involved in this program and I made several trips to Chicago to try to figure out with whoever I was working there in the HUD office how to do all this. There were a lot of forms. I would approach the families that we were purchasing from, like farmers, and say, "Okay, you can get these dollars to assist in your move." They had to get quotes and all this sort of stuff from me. The Chicago people were really stringent on making sure that I filled out every piece of information. So, we did several of these and I was moving families different places in the county and out of the county and they would get whatever the dollars were to move them physically covering all their costs. I'd make sure the moving vans were there and get them all set. This one farmer up in Crow Hassan said, "Well, I'm just going to move down the road here and I've got a lot of livestock and I've got things that I've got to move and I'm not going to use a moving van or anything. I'm going to use wagons and horses and tractors." So I had to convince the people in Chicago [of this]. I had to get a person from Chicago to come to Minnesota to go to this farm and understand [MW laughs] what I was talking about. There were several thousands of dollars involved in each of these moves and they would not sign off when I submitted this thing saying [that they would be using] wagons and horses and tractors [laughter]. It was a real eye-opener. So they sent this young woman up and she traveled around with me and I showed her. She had no clue of anything. This thing jumped in my mind as I was sitting here talking about it. But anyway, those were interesting things. But, back to acquisition and development. The acquisition never really stopped. It slowed down. At the time of the slowing down, development was starting up because we were getting pressure. "Now that you have these lands, we want to

use them," said people, from picnickers and campers to cross-country skiers and snowmobilers. As a staff, we found ourselves arguing mightily with each other about these uses that wanted to find their way into the parks. We had some wonderful wars between Natural Resources and Planning and Development.

MW: [Laughing] That's when it started!

DC: That's when it started. And I found myself refereeing between Dave Weaver and Mike Henry in particular. When Mike would say, "We're going to..."

MW: Were you Operations at the time?

DC: ...Yeah, I was Operations. And Mike would say, "We're going to put a trail from here to there," and Dave would say, "You're not going to do that." So they were shouting at each other constantly, arguing. [They were] wonderful arguments. It's really an interesting story in the fabric of this thing because it was really how the park system became what it is today. We understood because Dave made such legitimate strong arguments about natural resources and the protection of them. He was arguing from the eighty percent side, and Mike was arguing from the twenty percent side. We finally were able to work out through development planning, schemes of development, how to protect vital resources. These were critical learning curves for me because I all of the sudden started learning about biological inventories and something that I took from this job to another organization. The lesson learned was to understand what you're about to impact before you impact it. David made us go through these very detailed biological inventories where that staff, Larry [Gillette] and the others, were out and actually inventorying what was there. Then we would say, "Okay, we can put a trail from here to there and we'll protect these particular unique resources." That was important because it really drove the development that you all have today. I doubt that it has changed much in terms of its concepts. But that's really what happened. So then development really started to come. We had the nature centers. We had one at Elm Creek, Richardson...

MW: Richardson's at Hyland.

DC: ...Hyland and what was...

MW: Eastman.

DC: Yes, Eastman, yes. I remember the Eastman family. Then the trails were the big things. The exterior...

MW: You had the exterior and then tell me about Regional trails, too.

DC: ...The interior trails were the ones that were *really* important because what was going on is people were traveling out from Minneapolis and wherever coming to these parks and they weren't just spending an hour. They were spending several hours because we had trails, we had swimming opportunities, we had nature interpretation, we had picnicking, and in some parks camping, etcetera, etcetera. These day-use facilities became really important in terms of the experience of the users. The trails played a critical part of connecting various things within the park. Elm Creek in particular. As I remember, that park was about five thousand acres and I think we had about nine miles of paved trails. Then we put in that first swimming facility. Probably one of the most interesting stories was the playgrounds. Clif gets this idea that we were going to build our own playgrounds because he didn't like the idea of just the standard Miracle [Miracle Equipment Co.] candy-stripe playground [design] at that time. He had this idea of "Okay, we will build our own." So we came up with these ideas about these slides where you hold on to the bar...

MW: Cable rides.

DC: ...the cable rides, [MW laughs] and the slides down through the rocks. That was all Clif's baby. I think for the first time we saw a different side to Clif. There was this guy that had this great interest in children's play. And he was so enthusiastic about this. Then all of the sudden we're building these things. We didn't know what the hell we were doing [MW laughs]. We were building these things and we thought it would be great to build these cable slides. They were so much fun, but in hindsight they were so dangerous [laughter]. Kids would sail down these things. We were trying to figure out how to slow them down, so we dropped the cable a little bit. Don Olstad was out there. We were just going and doing

this. We were pretty successful at it apparently, because we did one at Baker, then we did one at Lake Rebecca, then I think we did one at Elm Creek. [That's] what I remember.

MW: Oh yes, yes, those are, you're right.

DC: I got a call from one of the playground manufacturers. It wasn't Miracle, it was GameTime, I think. Their representative was in Minnesota and he was very alarmed because we had contacted him and we were wanting to buy components like the beds of slides, but not the legs. We just wanted the bed and we wanted different things for swings and whatever. He wasn't happy, so he brought out this woman from New York.

MW: Fran Wallach.

DC: Yes, Fran Wallach. Fran was brought in to convince me that what we were doing was wrong and dangerous and that we should not continue. Game Time, I guess, decided that they were losing revenue from us doing this. So they were [laughs], they were going to stop us.

MW: Ahhh, interesting.

DC: So Fran came to tell me how bad this was, how bad this concept was. And of course, we were [laughing], we didn't pay a bit of attention to her. We just continued right on down the road [laughing]. But Clif had so much fun doing that. And as I say, we were just a bunch of young guys and gals. We didn't know. We didn't have a whole lot of rules and we were just doing things; we just created. Created and went forward with ideas we had. We made mistakes, without question, we made mistakes. But we also did some really fun and interesting things that resulted in lots of people having lots of fun in the park reserves.

MW: Wow.

DC: And probably one of the biggest things that happened in the Park Reserves was the cross-country ski program. I can't remember exactly how we got into that program. I remember clearly when we did it, I just don't remember exactly how we got the idea to do it. We had cross-country skiers on staff, obviously. We got this notion that maybe what we should do is start building trails because we had a lot of pressure for snowmobile trails. We

had some really difficult public meetings and discussions about snowmobiles because at that time, the State of Minnesota was promoting aggressively the idea of snowmobiling on a statewide basis. And here we were saying [that] we don't want them in our Park Reserves. Because we were so close to the population, people were complaining about driving and all that. We thought "Okay, we've got to do something about it." We had public meetings and they were just wild. We had Les Blacklock. Les Blacklock was a nationally-known wildlife photographer. And Les became part of that effort of the biological inventories and worked on that in Carver Park in particular. He did that whole park for us. Les was deeply involved in this fight about the snowmobiles. There was a lot of politics at play and there was political pressure on the Board at that time. Larry Haeg, who I believe was the General Manager of WCCO Radio and probably television at that point, was getting pressure from sponsors about that. I remember him holding his ground and saying [that] we've got to work on this, but we're not just giving up. So that was a big thing. It was a big event for us and we finally came to the acceptance of connecting the parks through trails and putting the trails on the outside edges of the parks. Because our acquisitions had gone to roads in most cases, we were able to parallel the roads with the trails. That satisfied the snowmobilers generally, not completely, but generally. It satisfied the natural resources side of our constituency because it wasn't interfering. We knew that we had a problem with noise, but the industry was getting pressured anyway about noise so that was coming along. Then it seemed logical for us to bring cross-country skiers into the mix. That program just exploded. As I remember, we bought a hundred pairs of skis and we started at Baker in the back of the barn or someplace. We had a little place out there and I remember we took off with that program. That was probably one of the biggest things. It helped change [participation in winter activities]. Minnesota was already seeing change because of the snowmobile, but when people got back on cross-country skis, we were the biggest program for a long time. They got back on cross-country skis, [and] all of the sudden they were going to their cabins up north again. All of the sudden the state got

involved and we had trails being built across the state. We were a big part of making all that happen through the park system.

MW: What would you say was your biggest accomplishment at the Park District?

DC: Oh, gosh.

MW: For you.

DC: [Sigh] I don't really know. I haven't thought about it in that way. I always thought about being part of something, not being "the" something. I was involved in a lot of things that were important, that were meaningful. When I left the park system, I was offered the job in Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission. When I interviewed with them and talked about what I had been doing, they were excited about the prospects of me coming there because of the experiences that I had. I could rattle off a lot of different things that they were interested in or were doing, Park Rangers, acquisition, development, etcetera. They had a policy at that time of two-thirds, one-third. I was coming from an organization that had a strong policy of 80/20. So, there was a lot of commonality. For me, it seemed like a natural fit and I guess it seemed like one for them too. But, as I look back, Margie, I don't know that I can tell anything in particular that I did that I would consider to be an outstanding contribution. I'd like to think that my efforts made a difference at various times when I was there. I really enjoyed the operations piece a lot because it was managing parks, which I really enjoyed a lot. I think we did some interesting programs. One of the programs that I remember was controversial at the time. I decided that we needed to bring recreation into the park system and I remember the resistance was very aggressive from the interpretive staff. I talked to the interpretive staff about the notion of outdoor recreation as a concept that we should introduce into programming, interpretive programming, and bring people out to the parks and get them involved in activities as part of interpretation, as an adventure. The resistance was pretty aggressive and I was not very popular for a long time because of that. Some naturalists, certainly not all naturalists, but some naturalists had a puristic approach to interpretation

and they felt that anything other than the traditional interpretive programming was a compromise. So, it took a long time and a lot of effort and bringing in different people, in some cases, to change that. Tom McDowell was one of those people. Tom understood. He didn't fight it. He understood it. Tom was caught between the two worlds of the interpreters and the outdoor recreation concept. He loved both and so he found himself in a difficult position but I credit Tom with the person who made it work. [It] wasn't me who made it work. I had the idea. Tom made it a reality. I couldn't have made it a reality in the same way because he had the respect of the interpreters. They didn't see me as part of them. They saw Tom as part of them. When I discovered that I thought "that's great, go get 'em." Tom did that and he did a wonderful job and he's created the program which I hope you still have.

MW: Yes, we do. That is a legacy, Don, if you brought that in because outdoor recreation is very strong in the Park District.

DC: It was something that I was afraid was going to get lost because we were so strongly oriented through natural resources with the traditional Robley and Dave, and then strongly through Jack Mauritz and Kathy Heidel. [Jack and Kathy] were wonderful interpreters, but they were so schooled in their processes that they didn't understand that people needed to *use* the parks and that was what was missing. So, it was, [laughs] it was an interesting time.

MW: What's your message to the Park District? If you had to leave a message for us what would that be?

DC: I think first of all, that I can't resist calling it the District because that's all I've ever known it to be. I think the District has done a wonderful job of staying with the ideals and the policies of the past in terms of following the protection of the Park Reserves, following the land use policies and adhering to them over all these years and continuing to reinforce those concepts. I think that the message is, "Don't ever waiver from the beginning." Never forget the roots of the organization. If you forget the roots then you can lose your way.

And it was easy to lose our way a lot of times. We could have gone a lot of different directions. There were discussions when the Minneapolis Commissioners came on to the Board. That was the point when we could have lost our way because there was pressure on us, pressure on Clif and on the Board, and the Board changed drastically at that time. We had a whole new way of thinking brought on to the Board. [However,] it wasn't particularly helpful to the concept of the Park Reserve system and what we were trying to do with the regional parks. We could have waived mightily then, but I think because the beginning was so strong and the roots were so set that the park system, the staff, the Board, and the citizens always knew what it was supposed to be. I think it has become so important now in the lives of people, increasingly over all those years, that I'm confident that it will never be lost. I really believe that. I [also] think it's been made to be better than when I left. I think that it's better now than when I was there. I think it's a stronger organization in terms of reaching out to recreation and leisure time needs because we were, at times I think to fault us, so concentrating on this concept of the reserves, minimal development, protection and so forth, that we were in danger of not understanding exactly what these parks could be and should be. You can get so focused that you can lose touch with that. I think as we got older as an organization, and as people, we increasingly understood that. [So] we started to bring people like you in, Marty in, the park managers, all with different backgrounds, and those influences started to shape the park system in a different way, but positively. I think that growth was really important. And Clif really, I think as he matured in age and experience, he continued to understand all of that and accept it. Sometimes he wanted to go back, but as he saw all these forces pushing towards us and understanding that we needed to do more, that's the regional parks, then we got into these other kinds of activities and so forth. I didn't have a chance to talk to Clif much after he retired. I saw him a few times. But, I think Clif was happy and satisfied with what had happened. He looked at French Park which was named before he passed away obviously. He had a real pride about that park. I think he understood that it was serving a different purpose than we

were set out originally to do and I think he was really happy about that. So my message is [to] keep going the way you're going. Protect those things that are important to protect and never forget the service end of this business, which is the only reason we should be in business is for the public and their leisure time.

MW: Thank you very much Don.

**Kathy Heidel
Former Employee
Narrator**

**Tom McDowell
Associate Superintendent
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer**

**September 20, 2010
at the Administrative Center
Three Rivers Park District
Plymouth, Minnesota**

TM: Kathy, welcome, thank you for arranging to come in. We are going to start by having you share a bit of your background. If you could just tell us, where are you from originally, before you had anything to do with the Park District?

KH: Well, I was born in Plymouth, Wisconsin, which is over next to Lake Michigan and was raised on a dairy farm by Arthur and Jeanette Heidel. I went to high school and graduated from High School of Plymouth in 1956 and went to the County Teacher's College and got certified to become an elementary school teacher. I taught school in Sheboygan County Wisconsin. [The] first two years [were] in a one room country school, just like I had gone to when I was a kid, and then the next six years were spent in the Village of Cedar Grove teaching fourth and fifth grades. Then I moved to Kohler, Wisconsin for the last two years that I taught in Wisconsin. I taught fourth grade there under the smoke stacks and the guise of the famous Kohler Company.

TM: I didn't add all that up, so you'd been teaching for...

KH: I taught eight years.

TM: Eight years.

KH: Eight years. And meanwhile, my brothers were going to the University of Wisconsin in Madison and they were taking wonderful classes that I never had a chance to take while I was doing my teacher training. I took a year from my teaching to go to the University in Madison and take classes that would give me a better background in Geology, Zoology, Botany, Astronomy, Ecology, and things like that. At that time, I met my TA in Geology,

who was quite influential on me. She suggested that I come back and spend another year and work on my Master's [Degree] and so I did. I worked on my Master's in the Department of Education and ultimately got my Master's Degree in Science Education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. I had my Bachelor's Degree between 1958 and 1964 or something. I got my Bachelor's Degree from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, in Elementary Education.

TM: Were you pursuing your Master's while you were teaching then?

KH: No, I was not. I was pursuing my Bachelor's while I was teaching because I began with only two years of training at the normal school and then while I was teaching, I was getting my Bachelor's Degree. Then I came to Minnesota in 1968 and I had not completed my Master's. So in 1974, I managed to complete my Master's Degree by taking a summer off and going to write my thesis and doing my orals and things at the University. Cliff French let me go [laughter].

TM: Okay, well then, the question we're leading up to then, can you share how you transitioned from a schoolteacher in Wisconsin to coming to the Park District?

KH: Well, I had always had a very strong interest in nature. My father's uncle was a professional botanist and he turned me into a botanist by the time I was thirteen. I also had a lot of natural history stuff that I had done when I was in 4-H and there were holes in my background that I was just dying to fill in terms of the sciences. When I was still teaching, I was lucky enough to have gone to the Audubon Camp of Wisconsin which was up near Sarona/Spooner area and was hired to work there. That is where I met Jack and Marlyn Mauritz and that was in 19-, oh gosh, 64, I think. Jack was the botany instructor up there and I had been the storekeeper running their retail operation at the Audubon Camp. We got to know each other and I did a lot of trotting around on the landscape getting more and more educated. One of the influential teachers that I had while I was at the camp was Bill Stapf from the University of Michigan and he, at the time, was taking a job at the Aullwood Audubon Center. The new Audubon Center [in] Dayton...

TM: In Ohio.

KH: Ohio, yes. He was very influential in developing my background for a broad spectrum outdoor education and techniques. Then I went to the Audubon Camp and that's where I met Jack and Marlyn and meanwhile I was still teaching school. When Jack got the job of heading up the new nature center program here in Minnesota in the Park District, here in Hennepin County, he wrote me a letter and asked me to apply for the job of naturalist. He had seen me working with people at the Audubon Camp and apparently he was impressed and I had the working background because I was teaching elementary children and he had already talked with Joe Primo from the Minneapolis schools. Joe was a science coordinator and he had committed the Minneapolis Public Schools to sending all their fourth graders out to our nature center when we opened it. So Jack thought he better get busy and get somebody who had taught the fourth grade on his staff [laughing] and so he asked me to apply. I came up and stayed with Marlyn and Jack in their little temporary abode up in Rockford, [MN], because he had come on the job earlier in the spring of that year and I came up in the summer of 1968. I came up there shortly after they got here and I talked with Clif French. Jack bowed out on the interview because he felt he was biased [laughing]. So I talked with Clif one-on-one about, you know, what I perceived [the job] could be...I didn't know much of what the job would be, but Clif told me that they had a refuge and they had Trumpeter Swans. I'd never seen a Trumpeter Swan in my life. I'd gotten turned onto birding at the Audubon Camp and so I said, "Hmm, Trumpeter Swans, I'll come" [laughing].

TM: Do you know, were you the first naturalist hired?

KH: I was the first naturalist hired. I was the first naturalist. I didn't even apply for the job, I was asked to come. And so, yes, I was the first naturalist hired.

TM: And do you know, were there others hired in succession after that, or at the same time?

KH: I don't know that for certain. I know that Molly Redmond was hired very shortly after I was, but she was not able to come to the job right away because she was climbing some

mountains, I guess, in Washington or someplace like that. But, yes, she was the next one, and she had been working as a naturalist at the Wehr Nature Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She was the other person who had interpretive background experience. Jerry Jensen also applied for the job. He was a forestry person, but he apparently had applied for it. His wife was from this particular area, the Twin Cities area. I don't know how many other applicants there were for the job. I never asked Jack. All I know is that he told me I was the first one hired. I was his first choice. So that's how that happened.

TM: What can you tell me about the Metropolitan Nature Center Foundation?

KH: Well, it was a coalition of people that Goodrich and Louisa Lowry pulled together. Goodrich Lowry had just retired from being the head of Northwestern Bank, ah, whatever it was. Anyway, he had retired from that. He was on the Audubon Board, the National Audubon. He was an avid birder, had [been] one of the preeminent birders in the country. He and his wife Louisa had a daughter who lived in New York City and apparently when they were out, somewhere out east, they had gotten initiated into going to a nature center. He was quite an environmentalist. He wanted to find some way to capture the next generation of children, turn them into people who were advocates for the environment. So, because he had money, he was able to go and see what facilities there were in the country that they could model their dream on. So, he went to Audubon. National Audubon was one of the few organizations in the country at that time, in the early sixties, that had environmental education, outdoor education programs for children. There were a number of places in connection with college training campuses where they did have camps [that] kids could go to. But nature centers where you could have day trips were an unusual thing. So, they went out to Greenwich, Connecticut, they went out to Delaware and they went to several other places. The place that impressed them the most was the new nature center at Aullwood in Ohio.

TM: Dayton, Ohio.

KH: Dayton, Ohio. So, they came back with their ideas, they consulted with the planning division of National Audubon and they came up with a plan, so to speak. Then, Goodrich pitched it to the elite members of the Minneapolis Club and other movers-and-shakers in the metro area. At Lowry Nature Center there is a big plaque that lists all the members of that particular group. And, you know, he had his chief fundraiser on that Metropolitan Nature Center [Foundation], Whitney Eastman. Whitney Eastman was big in General Mills, I think it was General Mills, and he was an extraordinary birder. He traveled all over the world to watch birds. He and Goodrich were tight in that direction and he was an incredible fundraiser. So, he was chief fundraiser and Whitney's lowest amount of money that he would accept from any donor was twenty-five thousand dollars. That was the starting, yes. He figured if he had at least four twenty-five thousand dollar donors he would have enough seed money to start the project. Another member of the Board was Dayton, Wallace Dayton, of the Dayton Family. There was an Ankeny on it. She was from Archer Daniels Midland, Ankeny ..., and there was a McMillan, I think. There was a Crosby and I don't know how many other, all of them were people who were either of influence, most of them had money, and they had ways of contacting people to get the idea going.

TM: I'm trying to remember whether the acquisition of Carver Park Reserve was going on concurrently when the Metropolitan Nature Center Foundation was being formed. I honestly don't remember the dates but some of the same people were involved in the ownership and the acquisition of some of what became Carver Park Reserve.

KH: Yes, that was a project of the Crosby Corporation, of which, McKnight, what was his name?

TM: Henry McKnight?

KH: Henry McKnight was the big name in that group. It was his family, he was from the Crosby's. I think a Crosby married a McKnight and that's how he became a part of that family. And the Crosby family, of course, was from the Washburn-Crosby Flour Mills that began that milling company, so they were big old money. Henry had the title and he had

the bulk of the money that was put into this corporation and their idea was to begin an elite housing development which was the prototype that we now know called Jonathan. He had decided that it was going to be where Carver Park Reserve is nowadays. He had begun work out there to connect it to Lake Minnetonka. There was a canal that was dug to go to Lake Minnetonka so boats from all the people who had their properties there would be able to access the big lake, and he had the series of ponds put in with a dike dam system so that every house could have property on a piece of water. Then they set about, the family, the group, set about buying up the properties from area farmers. The core property, which was over a thousand acres, was bought from willing sellers, a willing farmer, you know, farm owners who were willing to sell their property because they were offering up a price that was higher than most people were getting at that time. And so, the core piece of property was accomplished by that group. Henry lived near Victoria and his wife Grace was quite the equestrian. She needed a piece of property to set up her steeplechase course, so that was installed out there and there still are a few remnants.

TM: Really? I did not know that.

KH: Yeah, there still are a few remnants of where she had her jumps. Betty Crosby was the wife of Franklin Crosby who was, I think, the brother of McKnight, I don't know, McKnight's mother or something like that, I'm not sure exactly. But anyway, Betty would come out to the nature center when I first got there and she would tell me about how the family had come out to use that thousand acres, or whatever it was, to have family picnics. They held the land but they never really did anything with it because Henry got involved in state politics. Apparently for some reason or other, it was, I'm not real clear on this, but I think they were concerned that there was a conflict of interest with his Jonathan Corporation project there and his running for state senate. So he divested himself of his involvement with the Crosby Corporation and of course took his money and his name with him. That's what Betty told me, so she said he kind of left us holding the bag.

TM: And McKnight and Crosby were half-brothers.

KH: Half-brothers, okay, it was something like that. Anyway, the rest of them were kind of left holding the bag, so to speak, and didn't have the same dream apparently, so they put the property up for auction. That's the story I was told by Betty Crosby. Because there were ties between the Crosbys and McKnights with some people who were involved with the fledgling Park Reserve District.

TM: Okay, some of the charter board members.

KH: Baker, I think it was Bill, I think Bill Baker and Crosby McKnight worked together or knew each other.

TM: Sure, well, and Bill Baker was a realtor and my guess is McKnight was in that business as well.

KH: Yeah, and Baker, of course, had donated the land to start the Baker Park Reserve...

TM: On Lake Independence.

KH: ...and start the Park Reserve. So, he alerted the Park Reserve Board of Commissioners to the fact that this property was coming up for auction, so they bid on it and somehow or other...

TM: Acquired it.

KH: ...They did not get it given to them, they did not get a real sweet deal or anything like that. They paid at the time when they bought that property from the Crosby Corporation, about a thousand dollars an acre, which was more than any farmland was going for at the time.

TM: Sure, and that was in the early to mid-sixties.

KH: That was in the early sixties, yes, I think it was 1962 or something like that. So, that's the story I got from Betty Crosby. That was, I think, probably the closest I could have come. I never knew Henry, never met him, and Betty by this time was a widow, so...

TM: Well, and speaking of people that you did know, you knew Goodrich Lowry.

KH: Oh, I knew Goodrich and Louisa Lowry, yes.

TM: Through birding and through connections

KH: No, through Jack, through Jack Mauritz. You see, I was living in Wisconsin, I was birding in Wisconsin. I didn't know anybody in Minnesota except Jack Mauritz and a couple of other people from Audubon, but Goodrich and Louisa invited us into their home. I think I went with Jack and Marlyn to their home. I think this was before...Molly wasn't available and Jerry also wasn't on the job because Jack and Molly and Jerry and I were the first four people. I remember going to Goodrich and Louisa's house on...

TM: I want to say Ferndale.

KH: ...Ferndale, right, and on the big marsh and looking out at the marsh and seeing the purple loosestrife out there and the cattails and I remember saying to Goodrich, "I think we're going to have a problem with that plant" [laughing] way back then.

TM: Well, I sometimes refer to Goodrich Lowry as the Father of Outdoor Education within the Park District because of his strong interest in forming the Metropolitan Nature Center Foundation. I have often wondered whether he spawned that idea concurrent with the folks that were interested in acquiring land to create a park district, whether those ideas kind of sprang up independent of each other. It certainly forged kind of a perfect union.

KH: Well, yes it did. The thing is that, Metropolitan Nature Centers raised enough money to build a building and hire a staff, but they didn't have enough money to buy any land. They were land poor and ideas and staff rich, but no property. And so, through Bill Baker, again, the suggestion was made that they approach the Hennepin County Park Reserve District to see whether or not they could site a nature center and run it for three years with no cost to the Park District in one of their properties. Then when they were apparently amenable to the idea, I don't know if it was the Park Reserve or if it was Metropolitan Nature Centers, Inc., but they hired Les Blacklock to do an assessment of the various properties that the Park District owned at the time to see if they could find--under the guidelines of what National Audubon's planners had put together [for] what you would need to have for a nature center-- which park would be a good place to site a nature center. I guess of all the ones that they looked at, they felt that Carver was probably the best place

to site the nature center. With that information in mind, the Park District was formally approached by Metropolitan Nature Centers to see whether or not they would agree to this working agreement that the nature centers organization would, I think, rent the land for a dollar a year, and that during that time they would run this nature center, they would follow the rules and regulations that the Park had on how the land could be used. I mean, it wasn't to be anything that would go against that 80/20 policy that was established. They would hire the staff and pay the staff, and at the end of a three-year period, they would turn it over to the Park District lock, stock and barrel with no extra charges. It was quite a gift to the Park District.

TM: And at the same time it was quite an experiment too.

KH: It was an experiment and it was difficult for Park District personnel because Clif French was from a park and recreation background and most of the people that they had hired to do programming or whatever else, were pretty much from the park and recreation area. Even the departments that they had—maintenance, operations, wildlife, and forestry—they were all related to park and recreation development and operations. So, it was an experiment. Clif French was not ecstatic about the idea, partly I think because he didn't understand the idea of having schoolchildren come out to a nature center when the Park District wasn't getting any education dollars from the State Department of Education, and we never did. Here we were basically subsidizing education in Minnesota without getting remuneration for it. At that time, we did not charge any of the schools anything for coming out. We were just glad to get them to come out. At that particular time also, Jack was working very hard at making contacts with the education community. [He] met with the Superintendent of Minneapolis Schools, he met with the Superintendent of Minnetonka Schools, [and] all the major school districts in the Hennepin County area. While he was doing all this meeting, and also meeting with various City officials and the County Board and all that sort of thing, he had charged Molly and Jerry and me with working up some kind of a curriculum plan, and things that we could do and a way to get the message out to

teachers [of] what we were planning to do. And so we wrote our first field-trip plan and our first working field-trip preparation booklet for teachers. We also went in and met with teachers in various schools to see if we couldn't get some of them to come out and try us out. Unfortunately in 1968, it was a very wet year, and the work on the building and the road was delayed because of trying to get that mile road back into the interior of Carver Park Reserve with the clay that they have out there; it was very difficult. One of the big transport trucks that came in with the great big concrete beams for the first floor of the building slid down the hill and landed in the pond. You can still to this day [see] the corner of that beam was cracked [laughing].

TM: So they had to retrieve [it] from the pond?

KH: Well yes, the corner of that concrete three-sided, whatever it was, beam, got damaged a bit. They had to get a big crane in to get that out and that delayed everything. And yes, you know, construction sometimes is tough. We did get a furnace in and we had the basement enclosed and the upstairs was enclosed but not finished and we got our first...

TM: School group.

KH: ...groups of schoolchildren from inner-city Minneapolis and they came out on a [snowy] day. We had an awful lot of snow in 1968, and it was really hard getting around. I remember taking the kids out and wading through the snow to get over to look at the swans, which were some distance from the nature center building, and finding out that these children didn't have adequate clothing. They didn't have any boots, they got cold wet feet, and so Jack promptly arranged with Hoigaard's and several other places to get us enough boots so we could outfit all the kids coming out, 60 kids. Then he managed to get rain cloaks so that they could keep warm and dry. The design of the boots, unfortunately, were all red and the kids didn't want to wear red boots [laughter]. But anyway, we did get some of the Minneapolis children to come out. We had school contacts with Westonka, which was in Mound, we had some Wayzata schools come out, and I think we had some Minnetonka classes come out. Shortly thereafter, I don't know if it was a year, I think

maybe it was a year after that, Jim Gilbert was teaching in the Hopkins School District and he was quite the outdoor educator. He was bringing his students out from Hopkins to the Nature Center and he just thought it was a marvelous idea and [wondered if] there [was] some way that he could get all the Hopkins school kids to come out. So, he hatched a plan with the Hopkins School District and the Metropolitan Nature Centers that if he could get the school district to agree to it, he would see to it that all their fourth-graders and whatever else kids would, *all* their elementary children would come out and use the park, and would the Park District offer him an office space at the Nature Center so that he could be on-site? The School District allowed him to be working full-time, half-time for the nature center and half-time for Hopkins.

TM: And did that happen before 1971? Or, while the Metropolitan Nature Center Foundation was still operating?

KH: I'm not sure about that whether they were or whether it was the Park District, but it was within the first three or four years.

TM: Yes. Well, and I mentioned 1971 because that's the three years at which point the Metropolitan Nature Center Foundation turned over the operation of the nature center to the Park and the Park District Board at that point incorporated the operating cost of the nature center into their general operating budget.

KH: Yes.

TM: So, I think that three-year period, I kind of refer to that as the "experiment" when this idea that Goodrich and Lowry and others had, was given the opportunity. It certainly seems as though there was enough positive feedback and positive evidence as the result of not only Goodrich's idea but of Jack's and your's, and the rest of the staff's implementation that when it came time for the Board to step up and take over the operation, they did so. In terms of the Park District's Outdoor Education commitment, it was really a key pivotal time.

KH: Absolutely, and it was not in agreement with all members of the Board or of the Park District staff. There was, you know, there was some hesitancy but Goodrich and his folks had been...

TM: Fairly convincing.

KH: ...they were, had been very convincing and they were very powerful in terms of influence in the metropolitan area.

TM: Well, and they raised money beyond...

KH: Yes, Whitney didn't stop raising money. He is having so much fun milking people for money that they expanded their idea that if there was money left over, after they had constructed this nature center and hired the staff, that they would then see if they couldn't start another nature center, see how far their money would go. It wasn't very long after [that] we opened our doors at Lowry. [That] was in February of 1969, was when we finally had enough for heat and everything else. We already had the Minneapolis School District committed. They had a line item in their budget for field trip monies to the Lowry Nature Center, so they had committed themselves. We had the Westonka School District that bought into it. They would send us all of their sixth graders and their teachers would come out and help with us. I remember going in and meeting with them and constructing their curriculum. We had a lot of teachers and a lot of support. It was really the idea that was flying and Whitney Eastman had raised enough money that they were then casting about to start another nature center. One of the members of that coalition was Mrs. East...no, uh, what was...

TM: Richardson?

KH: Richardson. Mrs. Richardson, Priscilla Richardson. She had money she wanted to put somewhere and so apparently in their talking, they decided that they would fund a second nature center and they would build it in an existing building in Hyland Lake Park Reserve and that happened to be the house where Jack and Marlyn Mauritz and their family were

living at the time. And Jerry Gray, who was later Park Manager there, was living in the second house. So, that happened in, well I don't know, was it 1969, 1970?

TM: Early seventies, I think. I heard that the construction cost of Lowry Nature Center was \$233,000 and that when Whitney Eastman was done [with] his fundraising effort, he had raised \$600,000.

KH: Yes. I had heard that. But anyway, yes, there was money left over and so they did Priscilla Richardson's Nature Center. There was still money left over and everybody in the whole metro area, in fact in Minnesota, had gotten on board during these few early years, [and] the nature centers were the thing to have. We found out that shortly after we had Lowry Nature Center, Wood Lake had a nature center, and then of course we had Richardson Nature Center come on board. There was a nature center existent in, two nature centers existent in the state before, in the metro area, before Lowry opened its doors. They were both private, one was the one in West St. Paul...

TM: Dodge.

KH: Dodge. Mrs. Dodge had a farm. Mrs. Dodge was looking for a way to get it as a tax exemption so she opened her farm up to school kids from West St. Paul and hired a naturalist, Dick Abraham, to run that. The Wilder Foundation owned property up north of White Bear Lake and they had Bernie Fashingbauer leading that particular facility and they worked with the Junior League of, I think St. Paul, and White Bear Lake or whatever it was, and they trained them to be their staff people, be their interpretive people. They had one other staff member who I think was in charge of displays and all that kind of stuff in their nature center. But the Wilder Foundation, which later became Warner...

TM: Rose and Lee Warner.

KH: Rose and Lee Warner, yes, but it was initially Wilder. And so we went to Lee and Rose, the Wilder Nature Center, we met Bernie Fashingbauer to see how they were doing business and that was in the fall of 1968, or it was winter of sixty-eight, I think. We saw their bird banding operation. We saw their stations where they had their people stationed

and the kids would go around from station to station. We saw their boardwalk that they had across their bog area and that basically also inspired us with the Park District to get some floating dock areas in our wetlands. We also went to Dodge, but we knew we weren't going to operate a farm so we didn't spend too much time. But Dick Abraham, Jack Mauritz, Bernie Fashingbauer and then Mike Link, from North Woods, they were all a core group of guys who were leading new nature centers, and so they formed a group that became the Minnesota Naturalists. They were the key members, the key founders of the Minnesota Naturalists.

TM: Is that right? So that's the evolution of that, I did not know that.

KH: Yes, they were an exclusive club [laughter] and eventually they opened it up to membership.

TM: And Rose and Lee Warner, which was affiliated with the Wilder Foundation, ultimately became an affiliate of the Science Museum of Minnesota.

KH: Yes, the Science Museum of Minnesota.

TM: And Bernie continued on staff there?

KH: Yes, yes. We also had quite a bit of interface with Dick Barthelemy who was at the Bell Museum of Natural History. He was their perpetrator for their, what do you call that, all the animals and everything in the...

TM: The dioramas in the Bell Museum?

KH: Yeah, but all the things behind the scene and all the...

TM: Oh, the archives.

KH: ...herbarium. Now it's the equivalent of a herbarium, all the birds and all the animals and he was responsible for seeing to it that the displays had the things that they needed. And so he loaned us, in our nature centers, a number of their portable displays that they had on the outside of viewing areas and so we still have a lot of those.

TM: Now, Dr. Breckenridge was at the Bell [Museum] at that time.

KH: Dr. Breckenridge was at the Bell. He was heading up the Bell and he was one of the people who interviewed Jack for his initial job.

TM: Okay.

KH: I met Breckenridge] very shortly after I came up here and Jack Mauritz had encouraged me to get a bird banding license because Bernie had that up there at Lee and Rose Warner, or Wilder, and he thought that would be a terrific educational come-on for people, a neat experience to be able to show children and adults because by that time we were also having programming for the public on weekends, for adults. That would be a way of having them have an eye on real science. I had worked with some bird banders in Wisconsin before I came to Minnesota. I had worked with Roy Lukes up at the Ridges Sanctuary in Door County and I had worked with Marguerite Baumgartner of the Audubon Camp, she was a bird bander. I had been at the University of Wisconsin and I had a teacher [named] Joe Hickey. He was my teacher in Wildlife Ecology and his wife was a bird bander. So, when Jack recommended that I do that, he had invited Breck[enridge] out and Breck[enridge] and I were standing on the balcony of the Lowry Nature Center and we were talking about birds and, oh it was fun to just chat with him about birds, you know, and so...

TM: Well banding wasn't a foreign idea to you at that point.

KH: No it was not. No, I had helped with banding and so I knew Dr. Breckenridge and I knew Dr. Hickey and I knew Dr. Baumgartner. They were all professional people, zoologists all of them. They all were nationally recognized in the field of ornithology, and while Breck[enridge] wasn't a bird bander, I think he had banded birds. When it came time when I [had] to apply for a bird banding permit, I had to get references so I picked the cream of the crop [laughter]. I picked those three people and listed them as my references. I was not equipped to be a bird bander on my own. I didn't have any equipment, I didn't even know what you had to know but on the blind faith of those three people, they recommended me and I got my bird banding permit in November of 1968.

TM: No kidding. So that was early on and...

KH: Oh yes!

TM: But what...

KH: Well I didn't band, or I think it was, maybe it was sixty-nine [that] I got my bird banding permit and then I got a sub-permit and Marlyn Mauritz was my first sub-permittee.

TM: Well, what a foundation too, for a program that...

KH: Yeah...right. So, we began bird banding but we weren't doing it for the public. She and I were doing nest studies and banding birds and then we started, shortly thereafter, teaching some classes in birding and stuff like that. When Jim Gilbert came on at the nature center, he saw the value of offering bird banding as an educational experience. He and I hatched this program whereby we would have a bird banding station that the children would be able to come to and they would be able to see us at work, see how we trapped birds, what data we collected, why we were doing it, and then they would get a chance to help let the birds go, which was totally unorthodox. So, the banding office said--the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the time was our boss for the bird banding operation--that (bird banding) was only to be a scientific research tool. It was primarily established to help people who wanted to get PhD's in ornithology and stuff like that, you know, and run bird sanctuaries, but you were not to let the public get involved because that would skew your data. Well, Jim Gilbert and I said, "Pfft, how are they going to get scientists in the future if we don't train them today, if we don't expose them to real science?"

TM: Sure, exactly, give them an unforgettable experience.

KH: Yes! And it is an unforgettable experience, so he and I started that program and then he got his banding license too.

TM: Oh, no kidding.

KH: I gave him, he became a sub-permittee too. I also got a sub-permit for Tim Anderson and he banded at French while he was still working there. We had several other people who were sub-permitting under me so, in essence, nobody else in Minnesota at the time was doing bird banding as an educational program for school children. Well, Bernie

Fashingbauer was doing that at Lee and Rose Warner and that was where Jack got the idea. But shortly thereafter, I ended up training people for all the other budding nature centers that were starting all over the state.

TM: Sure. I was a sub-permittee for a brief period of time [laughing].

KH: And you were a sub-permittee of me too, that's right. But, it was through our effort at Lowry Nature Center in that aspect of outdoor education that we influenced the whole state. I think every nature center in the state now that offers programs for the public has a bird banding element because it is a wonderful way to catch people's attention. There have been people who've come to me even since I've retired and said, "I remember when we came as a kid and you were banding birds in the basement." Bus drivers who say, "I used to come out here and watch you do that, you let me handle a bird." It was the magic and I did learn how to play a little bit, you know. I showed Roger [Stein] this when I was out one Saturday when he was out at the nature center after I retired, I came back here. What I do is put the bird in the child's hand upside-down so it's lying on its back, then I put my hand over the top of it and said, "Now we're going to put it to sleep." So we rock it back and forth a little bit. They're really not putting it to sleep--rocking back and forth will keep them awake--but the darkness will put them to sleep. So, they go into a semi-trance. Then I say, "Now be real still," and I'd take my hand off and that bird is lying in that child's hand absolutely comatose and then I say, "Well now you have to wake it up, so you'll have to just jiggle your hand a little bit, jiggle your hand a little bit and then the bird flies away." And it's just, "Ohhhh, it's magic."

TM: Yes, absolutely is. And it is unforgettable and when else would they have an opportunity to do that?

KH: Well, that's one of the things then that I realized was magic. We went to a National Association of Interpretation meeting and some fellow from down south gave a talk about capturing the magic and passing it on to your visitors and I thought, "Yes, that's what we

do. We capture the magic and we send them back home with some of it." I used that bird banding as an example of that.

TM: Yes. I want to talk a bit about the evolution of outdoor education within the Park District and as a starting point for that, can you describe what it was like to be a naturalist in 1968, '69, '70, in terms of time spent with public programs, time spent with school groups, and time spent learning the resource and becoming more of a natural history-oriented person?

KH: I was hired because I'd had experience teaching school. We'd already had that commitment from the Minneapolis schools that they would send us their schoolchildren. Jack Mauritz felt that he needed to have a staff member, at least one staff member, who had teaching experience. In terms of getting ready to do that, we felt we needed to know our resource. You need to know what it is you're working with. I mean, I knew children and I knew child psychology and Molly also had been working with elementary children, so between the two of us and Jack of course, who was also a junior high teacher, senior high teacher, we knew the educational pedagogy of how you have to deal with them. We realized then that if you're going to teach something about natural history, you better know what it is you've got. Since our nature center was not open until February of 1969, and I came on deck in July, August of 1968, we had about five months of no clients and so, every week we would go out as staff to find out what the flora and the fauna was of each of our parks, what we had in terms of wetlands and forest. We discovered that we had in Crow Hassan Park Reserve some prairie component and [as] a result of that, we recommended that the Park District consider getting into some management of the prairie ecosystem, though they were only committed to basically forestry at the time. We spent a lot of time finding out that Jerry was very versed in forestry, Jack was an extraordinary botanist, an extraordinary scientist all the way around. I had had that good training in outdoor education through Bill Stapf and some of those other folks at the Audubon Camp and having been a teacher and having taken my students for eight years outside to do a lot of

education. That basically developed the core philosophy that we had of how you begin a program. We outlined where we thought trails should go so that we would have examples of all three of our major ecosystems; forests, wetlands and meadows. And then the planning with John Sunde in the planning department of the Park District, that was how the trails got laid out in the nature center program areas in the parks that we had decided. By that time we also had Eastman Nature Center up in Elm Creek. Each of these locations where we put our trail systems in, and where the buildings were sited, were predicated on how we could access the ecosystems for our educational needs primarily. That also colored the citing of trails and access points in other parts of the park later on for, you know, right on throughout the years. Have I deviated from the topic?.....

TM: Well, no, this is all great. Where I want to go with this is to talk about how the role of the naturalist may have changed during the time you were with the Park District. Early on you were saying that it was a fair amount of time [that] was committed to knowing the resource.

KH: Right. Also knowing the resource and then doing the trial classes, class visits with some of the schools and finding out how we wanted things to work out. At the time, the Landscape Arboretum did have some school programming, but it was totally leader-led, walk along behind and listen to a spiel that was totally passive on the part of any of the children. At this time in the science education field, it was a hands-on discovery type of education, gone a long ways away from when I was teaching science in my first eight years of teaching, where you had a book and you simply read the book, you didn't have equipment and you didn't do experiments with children in the elementary. Joe Primo said, "We will send our students out to you if you involve them in discovering what's going on in the natural world. We will not send them out if you're going to do this-is-a-this and that's-a-that walks." So that was a charge from the very beginning. How did we prepare ourselves? First of all, I mentioned that, we contacted teachers and they started coming out. We had established an idea that we wanted to have no more than fifteen children per

naturalist so we could really have a close involved interrelationship with them in the discovery process. We did not have volunteers coming in to help us or aides like they had done at Lee and Rose Warner or at Dodge. We felt that the best teaching was done with the naturalists who were intimately aware of teaching methods and also of the resource. I would say in terms of our time for the first year, most of our time was spent working with schoolchildren. We did not even have the nature center open on weekends until the fall of 1969. By that time we had at least enough trails that we could take people on to walk around and Clif French had basically given us the word that while Metropolitan Nature Centers were still running the operation, that we needed to have it open for the public because they were getting so much inquiry from neighbors around. So we started opening it up on weekends and Sunday afternoons, I think, and it was Sunday afternoon walks and stuff like that. Then I pulled most of those weekend things in the fall and early winter of 1969 because I was going to Africa on a month and a half trip. My friend from college days was in the Peace Corps and he was setting up a trip from Liberia, West Africa to East Africa for a month and a half and he invited me and paid the way for me to come to Africa and join him on this, this Peace Corps foray...

TM: Chance of a lifetime.

KH: ...chance of a lifetime. Goodrich Lowry had just come back from East Africa in 1968, and had made contacts with park superintendents. I met with Goodrich and he gave me access, he gave me names and numbers of people I should contact when I got to East Africa.

TM: No kidding?

KH: So, we met the superintendent of the parks of Tanzania, we met the superintendent of the parks in Kenya and so we had the "in", you know, and we got first-class treatment when I was over there. But, I pulled the work thing in the fall because Jack had some way he had to equal this with...

TM: Sure, he had to balance it out.

KH: ...balance it out, because we were still working five days a week with school classes. So, yes, I basically did most of the first public programs, too. We also started opening it on Saturdays and sometime in the fall I think of 1969, early fall, we had our first mixed group of students from the Science Museum of Minnesota. [They] came out with their parents and group leaders from whatever it was that they were studying, they came out and I was responsible for taking them around on the trail. It was there that I discovered [how to work with] a mixed age [group]. I had never worked with a mixed age group [because] I'd been teaching school. I'd teach kids when we were working with school kids. You work with kids, you don't teach the teachers, they're just along for the ride, more or less. Here I had leaders and parents and kids of all ages and I made a mistake. I spoke to the parents, I spoke to the adults and the kids ran rampant. And after that I thought, "Oh, that didn't work." I always did self-evaluation. We started that from the beginning with our whole staff. We'd always meet and evaluate what we did, and what worked and what didn't work. I thought, "Maybe I better switch it around," and I better talk to the kids, and then explain to the adults why I'm doing what I'm doing. So I started doing that, and that was a breakthrough. That was something that nobody else had done at the time, not even at the Arboretum and not at the other two centers, but it was working with multiple interpretation for multiple ages. I learned a lot and thank God that I learned it that early in my experience. So, that also colored how we as naturalists began working with our school groups.....we asked them to have the parents come along as aides and so we would explain to the adults, the teachers and the parents why we had the kids doing what we had them doing and also involving them, helping us by putting the children in small workgroups and then assigning some of these parents who want to stay in the back and chatter away like magpies and distract themselves and teachers who might say "well would they want to go out?" and "yes, you've got to come along." So, they had tasks to do along with their kids but they didn't have to take the lead. We were, as naturalists, still the leaders and the directors of this particular learning experience, and *that* the teachers liked. That was one of

the reasons they kept coming back to our nature centers. Because, at least at Lowry specifically, they never felt that they had to be alone. When Jim Gilbert started his program, he had the teachers take the children on a nature walk and then he would work with the other half of a group at the same time. What happened so often with the teacher-led group is that the kids just ran around the trail and the teachers just didn't know how to use the resource. They didn't *know* the resource. And for us to presume that the teachers who knew how to teach in the classroom would also know how to teach in the out-of-doors was an erroneous assumption. They were not comfortable. No more than we would have been uncomfortable going in and teaching a class in the classroom. It was hard to get all of our naturalists to understand that over the years. That was a hard nut to crack within our own organization. More and more we had to start spending time planning, not only school class programs, but also we had to start planning how we were going to program to the public and that was a whole different ball of wax because they expected to be entertained. The school children were coming out not because they wanted to, but because their teachers wanted to bring them out for a learning experience. The adults that were coming out on weekends, the family groups and whatever else, they were coming on their own volition and we better darn well entertain them while they were out having their experience. So we learned how to be entertainers as well as educators. When I first started, I was not cognizant of the fact that I had to entertain. In fact, I even had teachers who would say to the students, "We're out here to learn, not to have fun."

TM: Yes [laughing].

KH: And, I finally ended up realizing that learning was a whole lot more successful if you had fun.

TM: When it is fun, yes.

KH: And so, I had to explain to teachers and parents that we had to make it entertaining and fun for them. I was influential in working with all the staff at all of our nature centers and I was put in a role of basically mentoring some of that in my job, to teach that we have

to entertain and we have to come up with fun things. The Park District at this particular time also hired Laurie DeVeau to be their recreation programmer and she was responsible then for coming up with recreation programming that would work within the framework of what the Park District was going to be offering. We were not to have the same things that park and rec departments in area cities offered. So, Laurie worked with us naturalists, at coming up with recreation programming especially on weekends that would be more “fun and games” and less education. I believe, and I think we naturalists all believe that education and recreation go hand-in-hand. You can't have one without the other basically. I guess you can have some recreation, but you're still learning. But anyway, so we started doing recreation, we started working together with Laurie as a recreation programmer.

TM: Was that automatic? Did outdoor education staff realize that? You said that there had already been a realization and you were helping to facilitate the training of naturalists so that they understood that the education had to be entertaining, not only to the school kids, but particularly to the public audience that was coming there on their leisure time, and recreation was a great vehicle for that. Was that automatic that the program staff realized and embraced through Laurie DeVeau's role ... or was there kind of a “different ends of the same spectrum?”

KH: No, it was Clif French who said that “you will work with the recreation programmer” and “you will offer some recreation programming” and Jack [Mauritz] said “we will work with the recreation people and we will do this together.” So, we worked it out. Laurie was terrific, she was very open to doing that sort of thing. She came from a park and rec program in a city. Basically park and rec programmers in those days and to this day are pretty much facilitators rather than actually doing the programming themselves. They hire people to run their baseball teams and their this-and-that, their swimming and whatever else they've got going on. She was one person and we had mostly trails. We came up with our Halloween programs and we had a number of things that we could call recreation and we involved ourselves. And so, gradually over time, what happened was that we found out

that recreational activities fit so well with our educational activities that I don't think any of our educational experiences for school kids lacked for a recreational element. In some of our nature centers they leaned a little bit more towards the education type of things and a little less at the "play some games" type of thing. For instance, at Lowry, Jim Gilbert was strong in saying "every year we've got to come up with something slightly different to keep these teachers wanting to come back." When he was in Norway, he saw them using the kick-sleds and he bought one and brought it back, had it shipped back so that he could start the kick-sled idea on the ice in the wintertime. He's the one who decided that we ought to try punching holes in the ice and get into the business of "How did the ice fisherman work?" Jim was very, very far seeing and coming up with ideas like that, and so we ended up getting involved with those things. Jerry Gray was involved with starting the cross-country skiing and so we started having cross-country skiing activities in the wintertime that Laurie set up in some of our parks. We would send some of the students because the teachers requested it. They wanted the skiing experience. Then when we rented skis, they would have some of those kids ski for part of the day and part of the day they would be at the nature center. In 1968, no, sixty-eight, sixty-nine, we had so much snow we couldn't get around the trails. Bernie Fashingbauer at Warner had the snowshoe experience, so we bought snowshoes and we started having the snowshoe element. We had snowshoes to get around on the trails, but it became a recreation form. Gradually as the Park District evolved, we developed more and more recreation aspects in the park system and we developed a recreation staff which is every bit as big, if not bigger, than our interpretive staff. That's how it evolved over time.

TM: Do you think that evolution has had a positive impact on the quality of interpretation? It's a little bit of a loaded question, but it certainly has changed the way that we deliver our product, that we've blended in more recreation and you've mentioned that it was done rather intentionally and...

KH: Part of it Tom, has changed because of our staff changing. Our initial staff that we had at Lowry, we were very, very strong in our own personal scientific backgrounds. We knew soils, we knew forest, we knew water quality, we knew what was in the water. As we went on and we opened more centers and we hired more staff people, we had people coming in who didn't have those strong backgrounds. We never had anybody come in who had the botany background that Jack or I had. We never had anybody who came in who had the ecology background that I had. I had a better ecology background than Larry Gillette or Tom Jahnke and we have naturalists coming in now who really don't know the resource. And that, as far as I'm concerned, personally, and Jim Gilbert was always so adamant about this, he said, "You have to know the resource in order to be able to really maximize the use of it in your education." We have more cut-and-dried programs now, station-type, in some ways like they did in the Wilder Program way back in the beginning, where they had volunteers at stations and you came there and you basically were a little more passive in what you were learning. That was the trend I saw coming, as I got closer and closer to retirement, that we had more and more people who didn't know the resource well enough to feel comfortable in it. They were much more comfortable in doing programs that they could do anywhere.

TM: Well, and it's interesting, just as an aside, the Park District has recently developed a vision plan. We have quality as a core value that we aspire to. I also am participating at the state level with a committee that's providing feedback for the Clean Water Legacy Amendment funding and we've identified quality there as well. One of the high priorities has to be maintaining quality experiences. Well, when you discuss what that means, one of the things you get to fairly quickly is, you need to invest in quality in your staff and their training and their experience if you want to continue to develop and present quality experiences to your public.

KH: Right.

TM: And, certainly one could make the case that the communication skills and some of the other skill-sets that our interpreters have surpass perhaps some things that we've had in the past, but in terms of the naturalist, you know, natural history, knowing the resource quality, that is being identified as something that we need to start reinvesting in.

KH: Yes. Yes. I was seeing that happening and that was one of the things that I really strongly felt we needed to address as District-wide because I saw more and more people coming in who didn't have that comfort level and therefore, didn't have the creative thinking to design new experiences for our visitors that would peak and tweak their interest. Even when Nancy Harger was here, she was the one that, you know, when my job description changed personally from being a full-time naturalist to being a liaison with, with...

TM: Natural resources management.

KH: Natural Resources Management...um, one of the things that Nancy, who was my supervisor at the time, suggested that I be involved in [was] some of the in-house training which we were already doing at Lowry. Roger Stein, who was the Supervisor [at Lowry] after Jack Mauritz, felt that it was important that the staff get out and find out what was going on outdoors, so every season we would commit at least one day, if not two, to outdoor exploring, inventorying, finding out what we had, teaching each other and just basically honing our skills as scientists or whatever. It was just finding out what was going on. Also, the other thing that I did was I set up, during the year for all of our naturalists, days where we would have a focus. We would either have guests come in to teach us or we would teach each other and so that began that in-house workshopping. I suspect that you probably are continuing that in a different way to this day. We always felt it was very important. I think after Nancy left, and I think after I left, it probably didn't continue.

TM: Yes. It's interesting. In the early years I remember we brought in Josh Barkin, I believe.

KH: That's right, we did, yes.

TM: So, he's a nationally known interpreter with some innovative ideas and we brought him in for our interpretive staff. Just last week we brought in Peter Stobie, the Director of Kalamazoo Nature Center. It's a similar, equivalent program, new ideas, and we're funding this from the Clif French Endowment.

KH: Fantastic.

TM: So, it is still going, but you're right, we're kind of returning to it now. Any observations on changes that you saw--and these will be generalizations--but changes that you saw in the students as they came to the nature center from the schools, changes that you saw in the public that came to our programs?

KH: When we first started, we had a lot of city children that came out, you know, a lot of Minneapolis school kids. They were very much afraid to come out into the out-of-doors. We had students coming from the rural areas who assumed that they knew the out-of-doors and they didn't know it any better than the inner-city kids did. We also found out that we had an awful lot of uneducated teachers out there [laughs]. Our early days [were] really spent trying to find out ways that we could get out there exploring and still allay the fears of ticks and mosquitoes, the screaming woods, the tall grass, and whatever [else]. Students at the time when we started our nature centers, those students in all of our schools in Minnesota, were going into a challenge of trying to incorporate ecology into all of their programs. They went so far as to team up a member, a staff person from the Department of Natural Resources, with a staff person from the Department of Education, and they were charged with coming up with curriculum for the teachers in the State of Minnesota that would incorporate the out-of-doors, the natural world, in their teaching in the classrooms. Also, we grew up as a state coalition of naturalists and teachers, to come up with a curriculum that could be used all over the state. It wasn't very long before we began noticing that children were a little bit more knowledgeable about the out-of-doors. We also have to credit Sesame Street and Nova and the television where we had many more science programs and outdoor programs coming in on television. We began to get children coming

that were less fearful and more excited in getting out in the out-of-doors. Teachers became more excited about the field trips out-of-doors and I think their fears were allayed, too, that they were going to be thrust into an element where they would not really be in control. Then, we also, of course, had returns. We had children who had come as first-graders and then they got to second grade, "Are we going to go?" you know, and "Oh, my sister was out here." So, we started getting pressure from the *other* side, from in the schools *and* the families, and families started coming out with their kids and they had such good times that they would come back again and again. At the same time, we also had hired a volunteer coordinator, Rita Blackstad, and she worked with both Laurie and the recreation staff, which was still very small, and the naturalist staff, on how we could use volunteers to help further our programming. That volunteer corps basically added to the friends corps that we had at the time. We had established a friends corps at Lowry that would be an advocate for what we were doing. I think Dr. John Robertson was a member of that and I'm trying to remember who else was on there. But anyway, we started getting more advocates for us in the adult area of our park visitors and our park users, and the teachers talked with each other at their conventions. We went to conventions and did presentations and we went to workshops within the outdoor educational area. Jack and I both became members of the National Science

TM: Foundation?

KH: No. No, no, no, no. Minnesota Science Educators.

TM: Okay. NSTA? There's a National Science Teacher's Association.

KH: Yes, and some of us became members of that and Jack was always a member of the AAAS. We also had Minnesota Science Teachers and members of our staff became members of that organization. Jack and I both joined because we were both licensed educators and some of our other staff, other teachers in some of our nature centers who had education licenses, also became members. So, we were able to basically meet with

them in their conventions too, and so the word got out. Meanwhile, other nature centers were starting and Jack Pichotta had his nature center up there,...

TM: Wolf Ridge.

KH:Wolf Ridge, yes, and, anyway, they had Wilder. Wilder went into a residence situation. There was one over on the St. Croix. So, yes, it just...

TM: It caught on.

KH: ...it caught on, it definitely caught on.

TM: Something that I think of as being unique to you - you mentioned some mass media, the contributions of Sesame Street and Nova and so forth and you used Minnesota Public Radio and National Public Radio very effectively. I don't know how this all came about. So, if you could share some of that.

KH: It came about as a result of Jim Gilbert. Jim Gilbert had arranged [it] because he was, we were, into phenology. He and I basically formed the Minnesota Phenologists, which is, you keep track of happenings that are going on in nature and how they track from year to year to year. You keep meticulous records and he had a cadre of people around the state that were tracking ice-out dates and freeze-up dates and first blooming of apples and apple trees, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. He was contacted, or he contacted, I'm not sure how it was, but he became the WCCO Radio Naturalist and he had his report, I think it was every weekend on a Sunday morning or something like that. Well, Minnesota Public Radio wanted to get on the bandwagon and they wanted to hire Jim Gilbert to be their naturalist too, but WCCO wouldn't allow it. So, Jim recommended that they contact me. Dan Gunderson who was one of their lead reporters called me and asked me if I could come in and do a question and answer program on MPR. It was a one hour call-in thing that they had every Saturday. I didn't go every Saturday, I was invited to come in because they had a cancellation on the part of their guest. So I thought, "Well, if Jim can do it, I guess I can do it too because I'd been keeping the same kind of records he had." So I went in and did it and Bob Potter was the emcee for these calling programs, but there was one day when he was not available.

Dan was the interviewer, or they call it the host, the emcee, or whatever you call them. Anyway, Potter called me up and said he was so impressed he would like to have me come on with some regularity, add me to his list. So, we worked it out that I would come in once a season and do the question and answer questions about nature. Then I got the idea that maybe we ought to do radio field trips. That was my invention. I had heard something on the BBC, they had had people go to various places in the world and they recorded their expeditions, or whatever it was they did. They were usually shorts, but I talked Potter into a whole hour's worth of...

TM: In the field.

KH: ...in the field. And *that* became legend. I remember getting calls at the nature center from people who said, "Oh, that was wonderful. I was sitting in my armchair and I was going with you on your trip!" [Laughs].

TM: Well, and some of this was picked up nationally.

KH: It was picked up on the National Public Radio and they would air it from time to time. They would air it when they put it in what they called their green box, and then they could pull it out and they could air it and various stations around the country could air it. So, yes.

TM: Good deal. How long ago did that that run? It was in the eighties?

KH: Oh, Bob and I did it for at least twenty years, if not more.

TM: Is that right?

KH: Yes, yes. So I have a huge collection of those tapes because what I got out of it was a tape of every broadcast.

TM: Oh nice. Oh very good.

KH: Yes. But he and I were our own producers. We didn't have anybody to do anything for us. We got our sound person, we liked Scott Yankus a lot. He was really good at coming up with the stereo microphones for us and everything else. I would outfit Bob with the right clothing. [I] got him on snowshoes and got long underwear and boots for him and we would just go out. The program we would do would be three-part, and it was a good

format, it worked out fine. I used that as a way of basically getting to an audience that we didn't necessary access any other way. I always tried to promote the Park District to let them know that we were there, but I also wanted to let people know that getting out in nature was an important and a joyful thing. So, you have to credit Jim Gilbert for getting me into it [laughing].

TM: Good deal. Well, good. You know, we've covered just about all the ground that I wanted to cover, you mentioned a lot of names and a lot of experiences, are there any, either experiences or achievements that you feel particularly proud of as far as, you know, part of the legacy? Usually it's not for the individual to suggest what their legacy is, it's for others to do, but I will let you know that there are numerous facets of our outdoor education program in the Park District that *are* your legacy.

KH: Yes.

TM: Anything that you particularly feel was most significant?

KH: Well, yes, there are some things. I mentioned the bird-banding program. I think that's significant. The other thing that I think was so significant was that after every time that we worked with a group of people as a staff, we would sit down and have an evaluation session, and we had a form that we devised to fill out. We did this at Lowry until I left, so I was thirty-five...

TM: Public programs?

KH: Public programs. We did our own because we were doing them solo, but we had a sheet of paper, we filled that out too, and we had that all filed, all evaluations that we had, so I feel that *that* was how we really honed our programs. A program that's not evaluated and not looked at with, "Okay, how can we make it better or what should we take out," is a program that I feel has become stagnant. I know that it was not carried out at the other nature centers, but it was something that Jack [Mauritz] firmly believed in and so did I. And so we pushed it, he pushed it, and after he was gone, I kept it going. I really am proud of the variety of things that we pioneered at Lowry and to some degree, I helped pioneer it

at some of the other centers because I did work with the staff at the other centers. Another thing that I think I'm really proud of is the liaison that was established between the interpretive area and the natural resources management area because we were working in-- for a period of time, the naturalists were not working under the Department of Natural Resources but in operations and maintenance. We still realize that what was being studied and done in the park in terms of managing our resource, was extremely important to us, [so] we better darn well know it back-and-forth. Then we were eyes on the ground, so to speak, in the park and we could give feedback. Since I had a good grounding in natural resources education, I mean for my personal background, I could speak the same language that the wildlife folks and the forestry folks and the water quality folks, what they were doing. So, my liaison back-and-forth, I think was a valuable thing. It was valuable for me and it was valuable, I think, for natural resources. It was also valuable for the naturalists because out of that came those training sessions where I could take what was going on and get it out into the field.

TM: One of the things that I remember from that, and it's really somewhat obvious, but you pointed out to program staff, to outdoor education staff, that a lot of what is just the routine function of our natural resources management sections is interesting and educational to the public. Something as simple as letting a school group have an understanding of a lake draw-down or a tree spade operation. These things, you know, our natural resources staff are doing them right in the park, right amongst us, and we really weren't using those as educational opportunities, and yet, that could be one of the more memorable things that a school kid takes home with them.

KH: Oh, that was fascinating, the day that we had the tree planting in the parking lot at Lowry Nature Center. We had all those kids come out and we had Big John out there running the tree machine and drilling the holes and all that sort of thing. And oh, those kids were just fascinated and the teachers told me in feedback that they were talking about it for days. Big machines for little kids are just a magic thing, especially little boys. And so, the

more we can do that. And then to help plant trees. I remember going over to Bryant Lake when we had a whole school group came out and I walked around with a turtle on my arm, you know, talking with them, but they were out there helping planting trees and I was talking with them and their teachers individually about, you know, how this was working with the park system, and at the same time, talking with the forestry people who were there about how this was going to translate back into their stuff at school.

TM: And how helpful it is for our forestry folks to know that there's a lot of kids that have a little bit of an appreciation of what they're doing.

KH: Absolutely, absolutely. Yes, yes.

TM: Good. Well I, as we've probably gone at least for an hour...

KH: Oh, more than that I think [laughter].

TM: I think it has been. Anything that you want to make sure you had the opportunity to say and that we capture here in this interview. I've covered all of the ground. You retired from the Park District in [pause] I don't remember how long ago it was.

KH: Oh, well when I was sixty-five and now I'm seventy-two so it must be seven years ago.

TM: Seven years ago, okay, so 2003.

KH: Yes, 2003. Yes. It was a wonderful ride, let's put it that way. I had always said I thought I'd like to be a naturalist because I had trailed along behind naturalists when I was doing my teaching work with the Nature Conservancy. I trailed around behind Hugh Iltis from the University of Wisconsin. He was a plant man and I trailed along behind Joe Hickey when he was out doing wildlife stuff and I always thought, "Aw", and they were leading fieldtrips for the Nature Conservancy, "Gee I'd like to do that." I got my chance to try it, but I was always the teacher. To marry the two, the leading of a fieldtrip and also teaching and getting people involved, was a great, great education for me. See, when you're a teacher, you teach the whole year and you can take tests at the end of the year and you can see how the children have grown. Being a teacher, I came here to start working at the

nature center, and for the first three years I was not sure that I was making any difference whatsoever. I had many times when I felt, "Oh, I don't know [about] this, I can always go back to teaching." Now I know in retrospect what a tremendous experience it was for me to grow from that feeling to knowing just by working with people in that maybe hour timeframe that I had with them. I devised ways that I could see that I was making a difference right there, and that was a tremendous growth for me personally and professionally. It was wonderful to be able to liaison with a natural resources staff. I think if I had not had that opportunity I wouldn't have stayed as long as I had, because I had the opportunity to continue growing in my passion for wildlife management, my passion for forestry and the prairie, especially the prairie management. I really had a hand in that prairie management, I really got into that. So, I was able to grow. John Barten and the water quality team taught me stuff that I had had no background in, so I grew all the time because of the way my job was structured. Then, the opportunity to teach that to my peers made me even, made me really digest what I was learning, and then figuring out how to package it so that I could help my peers learn more.

TM: Well, and your contribution was during a critical period of the Park District. Now, you know, we're over fifty years old now and we talk about our acquisition phase and our development phase and so forth. Well, during our development phase, we were building a lot of recreational facilities, miles and miles of trail, visitor centers, campgrounds, swimming beaches, and so forth, and so it would have been very easy for the outdoor education, the interpretive element of the Park District to be somewhat marginalized or pushed off in the corner. Let the naturalists do what the naturalists do for the people that want that, but meanwhile we're opening up all these facilities for the rest of the folks to come out and recreate. And I think it was clear, your involvement was critical, in terms of making sure that that didn't happen and that the outdoor education program didn't come off the tracks and that we actually put out feeder roots into the rest of the Park District product to make

sure, as our mission commits us to, that we promote environmental stewardship in literally everything we do.

KH: Yes. Well, I wasn't about to let it happen because I could see that...

TM: That possibility was there.

KH: ...that possibility was there, especially after Jack Mauritz left the Park District. I mean, I fully adopted his dream and his dream was to basically be what it has become, but to always filter into all areas of whatever the Park District was doing. I just wasn't going to give up on it. I also felt that I had a responsibility to Goodrich Lowry, because I had promised him, in a face-to-face experience that I had with him. I promised him that for as long as I was part of the organization, I would see to it that the children and the adults that we worked with, but primarily the children, that we would prepare the next generation, to make a conscious effort to have them as advocates for the environment. Whatever way I could do it, I promised him I would do that...and I did.

TM: I think you did [KH laughs]. I think you succeeded very well. Well, thank you. As I say, I know we've run over a little bit, but I think we've covered all the ground that we'd like to cover and I'm sure that we will have provided a wealth of information for those people that are going to transcribe this and preserve it for posterity. Thank you.

KH: You're welcome.

Dave Weaver
Former Director of Natural Resources Management
For Three Rivers Park District
Narrator

Tom McDowell
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer

June 27, 2009
Manchester, Massachusetts

TM: Our topic of discussion is the history of the Park District. Specifically, we're talking to Dave about his role in the development of the natural resources base, which is one of the things that makes our Park District unique. Dave, if we could start off with an open-ended background question; where you're originally from, what's your education, and how is it that you got to the Park District?

DW: Well, I'm from Pelham, New York, about 20 miles from Times Square and people often ask me, "Well, what are you doing, a wildlife manager, a natural resources manager?" That's just the tack I took. I'm interested in natural resources. I'm particularly interested in birds, but my educational background is a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia in 1960. I'm one of the older guys on the block. From Washington and Lee I went into the Navy. I spent four years there on active duty, following which I entered the University of Michigan - School of Natural Resources for a Master's program. I got my Master's there in Wildlife Management in 1967. From there I pushed on and worked on my doctorate, my PhD, also at the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan. I received my degree in September of 1970, the thesis being "Parental Behavior in Herring Gulls and Its Effect on Reproductive Success." How's that for an esoteric subject?

In any case, from there I came to what was then called the Hennepin County Park Reserve District. I interviewed in January of 1971 and I don't remember how I heard about it. I think it just came across as a job opportunity, as they do in the grand scheme of things,

and I was hired as Wildlife Manager on February 15th of 1971. Clif French was the person who hired me and Robley Hunt, the Director of Forestry and Wildlife at that time, was my supervisor. I came on board shortly after Dick Haskett came on as Forester. Dick and I were kind of the fledgling staff for the natural resources management of the Park District and we worked together a lot in the field in trying to set a base of operation; i.e. what was the predominant vegetation in the Park Reserves? What was the wildlife like there, then? Of course, a lot of the property we were looking at was acquired agricultural lands that we had focus on for converting back to a natural condition, circa 1850. As far as the vegetation was concerned, there was maple-basswood forest and associated wildlife species. Now, where the circa 1850 came from, well it preceded me, but I think it was a part of the planning process that John Sunde and company pulled together. John was on board before I arrived.

TM: There were no program staff in place at that point. I sense that it was apparent to the small amount of staff that the energy was going to go into identifying and making sure that there was a natural resources-base. So you're acquiring farmland and then identifying what needed to be done in order to have this land returned to more of a natural state.

DW: It involved taking drained wetlands and restoring them by plugging up a drainage ditch or putting a dike across a waterway; trying to undo what the farmer had done to create more pasture land or crop land. Essentially, we were establishing the basis for wildlife management, forestry management, natural resources management and a park system. Once upon a time, the property was, in fact, a maple-basswood forest, it was native prairie, and there were wetlands that supported wetland-oriented wildlife and vegetation. In the early going, it was establishing relationships with other staff within the Park District, especially the planners John Sunde and Don King, to agree on a path to follow. Of course, the planners were primarily interested in the recreation end-of-things and how we were going to establish facilities that would be of interest to and draw in the users of Hennepin County. It was our jobs as natural resources managers, Dick Haskett, Robley and

I, to present a picture to the planners of what we would envision as a way to go. It goes then to the 80/20 Policy, which was in place before I got there. There was this policy that had been established and it was essentially our job, as natural resources managers, to see that the 80/20 Policy worked and was developed properly. Very early on we said, well, you know this 20 percent is not going to be all by itself off here in the corner, be it a campground, hiking trail or whatever. That 20 percent had to permeate and be involved with the 80 percent, so that the public could have a sense of the natural. I mean this is what this system was going to be all about; a natural resources-based outdoor recreation park system. So, how to best accomplish that is to have at least 80 percent of any given park reserve in its natural state. So, we had to restore both the natural plant communities and the wildlife that's associated with it.

TM: So the phrase "80/20 policy" was in place when you were hired.

DW: As nearly as I can remember, yes it was. It was our job essentially, to make sure that the policy was developed and properly adhered to. It was always interesting dialogue between staff of natural resources and staff of planning, as well as with the Superintendent who had his ideas on how things ought to evolve. I think Clif French was very much supportive of the 80/20 Policy and he just wanted to see that it was properly invoked. It was just so interesting being in on the ground floor of what was panning out to be a unique system of parks.

TM: And at that stage, I'm sensing that there wasn't as much emphasis on "We've got to hurry up and get people into the park." It was laying the groundwork.

DW: Early on it was laying the groundwork and it was all about acquisition. Yes, we in natural resources or in forestry and wildlife as it was then called under Robley, we had to essentially inventory what we had. What former wetlands could be restored to the best use as far as wildlife was concerned. And then, as we acquired these mostly agricultural properties, it was our job to assess what it used to be. I mean, this used to be a wetland. You can tell by some of the vegetation that remains that it is wetland dependent and this is

really what it should be when we're all said and done in restoring and revamping what once was circa 1850.

TM: So with wildlife management in the 70's, was there an emphasis on game management or some techniques or activities that were derived from game management within or outside the Park District?

DW: Yes. You have to remember that Robley Hunt was a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge Manager. Their job is to manage the resource for production of primarily waterfowl and for the use of waterfowl hunters. So, Robley never lost sight of that, but at the same time he was fully on board with what the intent was of the Park District. That, of course, was not enough for hunting. It was for natural areas. It was for essentially conservation of habitats that would support native wildlife species.

TM: Was there a feeling that one individual had that vision or was it the excitement that everyone got to share in establishing what this vision was going to be?

DW: Well, I think Robley was kind of "the Father" of that. He was the guy that set the ground-rules on how we were going to operate. He was certainly open to all kinds of suggestions and discussion from Dick and me, and I think we made a good team in that regard. It was in preparation for this little interview, I looked back over some of Robley's performance evaluations of me and not once, but a couple of times, he commented about how, "Dave needs to calm down. He needs to not be so, you know, excited about those who don't essentially see it our way as far as wildlife management is concerned." And this related to our association with the planners and how they perceived things; how well we want to do something in this particular position. But we had to barter with them, negotiate and say, "Well, this really belongs in the natural areas, but we certainly can have a campground that's adjacent to it." We would benefit from the feeling of the naturalness of the area. After all, we were developing a park reserve which we felt had to have a certain feel about it and how we could best illustrate it to the public. A lot of what we were doing remember, was not only natural resources conservation and restoration, but also education.

As education was coming into it, we had Jack Mauritz on board who started our environmental education program. Jack was a great, great ally in the natural resources end of things and seeing that we followed that track. Looking back on it, I think it was really just a fun and very exuberant, meaningful process that we went through to arrive at what came to be the Park Reserve District.

TM: We, today, still talk about this healthy tension between planning and development staff and natural resources staff. But there have been times over the years where we've questioned whether it was intense to the point of not being healthy.

DW: Productive.

TM: But it's interesting to hear that this was there at the very beginning.

DW: Oh yes, oh yes.

TM: Regarding the interaction with Clif French as Superintendent, John Sunde, Robley Hunt and others, how big was the workforce? Were you all working out of one area so there was interaction on a daily basis?

DW: Pretty much. We started out in the farmhouse on Lake Independence. What was it called? Maple Hill or Maple

TM: Maple Ridge?

DW: There was a farmhouse there that was acquired with the property and the Park Reserve District utilized these buildings as the District matured. As we moved from acquisition to operations and management of the property, in the beginning I remember Robley, Dick Haskett and me on the first floor of this farmhouse along with the secretary. What was her name? Philomena Lawton. Anyway, she acted as secretary to both planning and natural resources staff, and the planners were upstairs. They were up there in the "ivory tower." They were kind of the "King Pins" as far as how things were developed. But no, there was always that development. I'm trying to think where the first office was downtown for the Superintendent back in 1957 when it was first established. Then, it moved out to Baker Park Reserve. I'm just trying to remember where Clif's office was at

that point. I'm not coming up with that but, yes; there was a lot of interaction. The staff was not big, obviously. We were just building, just getting started. There was John Sunde who was the Chief Planner and Don King, and who else? That may have been it for starters in planning. Oh, Mike Henry. Mike Henry was there too, so at least the three of them. Oh how could I forget Mike?

TM: And then there was Robley, you and Dick?

DW: Yes.

TM: So, when you wanted to implement something, there wasn't a lot of bricks and mortar stuff happening at that point. But, in terms of natural resource management activities, there was work to be done. Where did the hands for that come from?

DW: Hands came from the maintenance crew. We didn't have maintenance people assigned to us per se, we had to work on those who were available at each given park area. We had Les Young early on, who was operating a bull-dozer or a back-hoe. There were times, I think before I got there, when Robley would get with Les and say, "Come with me and we'll put a bank down there where the swan pens are now." You know, there's a dike between them. And Lake Katrina, Robley would just put a plug in that drainage ditch and "voilà," we have a wetland! He would do that here and that there, I think unbeknownst to anyone.

TM: Permitting agencies may not have been in place at that point.

DW: Right and unbeknownst to the planners, because he was a pretty independent operator. So I think he had some difficulty getting on line and in sync in working with the planners to begin with.

TM: But, there was a lot of contract work. I'm thinking about the donut ponds or the water control structures. They were pretty much built in-house as opposed to hiring outside.

DW: Yes. Well, for starters they were just simple plugs. They were nothing fancy. Then, we got into the contracting; you know the drag lines, the dozers and what have you.

Robley was the man on the scene kind of directing traffic for all that. I'm pretty confident

that when it came to doing the contract-type work, we were getting the okay from Clif and planners on doing that. So it was interesting evolving the work association with the rest of the group. Eventually, we had maintenance workers who were assigned specifically to natural resources as time went on. Dick Haskett got Dan Leslin.

TM: Wow, that's a name I haven't heard for awhile.

DW: ...and a few other people.

TM: Merle Price probably?

DW: Well, Merle became the "Chief Banana" at Elm Creek, so we had to be in pretty good relationships with those guys to get support and work done.

TM: Now, this was also when Clif French was the primary person and a lot of acquisition was occurring. Were natural resource management staff and planners involved in assessing a potential acquisition, or as it was being acquired, was there an assessment being made that this was a good property and here's why?

DW: I'm sure John Sunde and crew were involved with that. I don't know if Robley may have been brought in a little bit. I certainly wasn't, I'm sure Dick wasn't, but I think it was primarily Clif and his association with the local farmers and what have you. Robley retired in January of '73, I became Director of Natural Resources Management in February of '73, and then we brought on Larry Gillette. My official title when I first came on was Wildlife Manager. When I became Director of Natural Resources Management, I felt that was a little bit more descriptive of what we really did, because there's more than just forestry and wildlife. Larry came in as Wildlife Manager and shortly thereafter we had Tom Jahnke come on as essentially a Forest Technician to Dick. So, we grew, slowly but surely, and very positively. We moved from the house down on Lake Independence to the barn, or excuse me, to the house associated with the barn up on the hill. That's where the Natural Resources Offices were. I think what happened was [that] the new building/office on Medicine Lake become the official Headquarters and the planners moved over there from the barn. We moved into the barn and so forth. So, it's kind of an evolution of things

there. As we grew in size and staff, we had to be especially cognizant of our relationship with the rest of the staff at Hennepin Parks as well as the maintenance crews; you know, “the make or break.” I mean we had to. There were a lot of personal relationships that had to be developed in order to achieve our purpose. Everybody had to be on the same page. It was an exercise in good will, if you will, to get along.

TM: When you accepted the Director of Natural Resources Management position, was there any additional direction to continue what Robley had started? Were there priorities that you remember being pointed out or a “hope” that you might tackle at that point with the changing of the leadership role? I know, or I’m at least under the impression, that the Natural Areas Management Policy was one of your initiatives that you got going and accomplished, or at least putting in writing.

DW: Yes, and that was certainly over time. But we became a little more aggressive in that toward the latter part of the ‘80s. As far as anything new and different from Robley, we continued pretty much the business of wetland restoration, knowing full well that would be the biggest bang for our buck as far as response of native wildlife to improved habitat.

TM: Breaking drain tiles and

DW: Breaking drain tiles right, plugging drainage ditches, putting in water control structures and then managing those wetlands as they matured. Of course, we had elm bark, elm disease what do we call it?

TM: The bark beetle, Dutch Elm Disease.

DW: Dutch Elm Disease. We had to deal with that and it took a lot of energy. It was Dick’s initiative to establish a native plant materials nursery and [we] saw that to fruition. Tom [Jahnke] managed to get that going, so it’s probably one of the real crown jewels of the Park District as far as its workability and what it did for restoring vegetation in the Park District as far as native was concerned. Robley had begun native prairie restoration. Then, Larry [Gillette] took it on and refined it quite a bit from what Robley had done; getting it locally grown, using seed sources to restore the prairie. I didn’t come on board as Director

with any grand scheme in mind, other than to do the best to restore these natural resources, so that as the Board and Superintendent envisioned, making this a natural resources-based system. We put together the natural areas planning and management policy with a lot of love and devotion with the intent of making sure that the 80/20 Policy was sacrosanct. I mean it was what made Hennepin Park Reserve District, the Park District, which became the Suburban Hennepin Regional Park District, which became Hennepin Parks, and now it's Three Rivers Park District. But to my knowledge, the policy was never adopted by the Board. There were other policy statements that were adopted. The 80/20 policy was adopted at some point, but this particular document per se, I don't think was ever, ever adopted by the Board.

TM: Independently, I believe it has been incorporated into other documents that have been Board approved.

DW: That was somewhat of a disappointment to me. I felt that after I left in 1990 at the end of June, that Doug Bryant as Superintendent wanted to whittle away at the natural resources base of the system. He being the city park guy that he was. I think you and your involvement with the natural resources management, and Tom and Larry, were constantly at the ready to try and stem his intentions to change that.

TM: Well, I remember the natural areas management policy piece was held up, as it identified the need for a companion piece. Much of what I was working on in the 90's was an active use area management policy. At one point it was called the Landscape Policy, but there was.....

DW: As in the 20 percent?

TM: As in the 20 percent. It was never formally adopted either, but we had these companion pieces that I think were identified within the active use areas. We had our hazard tree management, our pesticide use policies, and a number of things that really governed the types of activities that were acceptable within the active use areas. Do you

remember if there was ever a moment when there was Board direction to calculate and explain how the 80 and the 20 percents were to be calculated?

DW: I don't know if it was Board direction to do that. There may well have been. But, I do know that Don King, the planner and I, were constantly looking at and talking about that calculation and how do we work it. It was decided through some good discussion, and I thought rather rational discussion, that you subtract the open water areas. You subtract the wetlands that are a part of a park reserve, and then you calculate the 80 percent on what's remaining.

TM: Development.

DW: On what's remaining. You know, you take a trail and what impact does that have on the eighty percent? Obviously, it's got an impact and the impact is dependent upon the use of that trail. A snowmobile trail has perhaps a greater impact than does a hiking trail. But, we agreed on what's going to be what; ten feet on either side of the center of trail would be a part of that calculation. That went into determining what the 20 percent was. The campgrounds, the picnic areas; that defined, delineated the boundary of it up to essentially where the mowing stopped. That would be part of the 20 percent. Otherwise, you really start to equivocate on how much of that 80 percent is really natural area. I mean, because you can't have the 20 percent, you've got to have it permeating the 80 percent.

TM: You've mentioned that earlier and I wanted to come back to that. You use the word permeate. I suppose it would have been fairly simple if you just took a tract of land and carved out a corner and said, "Well there's your 20 percent and here's your 80 percent." But in fact, the goal was to provide access and if it's going to achieve its educational purpose...

DW: You've got to permeate.

TM: You've got to permeate. So, there has to be an interface between the active use area, and what better place for that to happen than on the trails. But, the trails were part of the active use area. They were part of the 20 percent and there was some recognition that

there was a need for an impact zone; not only for what it takes to construct a trail, but the impact beyond just the tread-way. Also, once the trail is established, there's an impact zone for trail usage; the noise or the impact of the presence of people on the trail extends beyond the treadway as well. It was to encompass that whole idea.

DW: And as you mentioned, in permeating that 80 percent, education is a very important part of what we intended for the public. That's one thing that I can, perhaps, look back on as a very important facet of my influence with the 80/20 policy; working with environmental education staff, working with the nature centers and helping to realize, number one, what they wanted to bring to the public in the way of education and to help permit that with use. We have impact areas in the 80 percent natural areas. Those areas where we say, "Yeah, we can have some access to areas that we would normally preclude the public from using for the sake of education." Whether it be because, over in this particular part we have a nesting American Bittern or something like that. If we can have access within reason to view something, or maybe that's not a good example. Or just being able to work with the likes of Kathy Heidel, Tom McDowell and other naturalists, it was important to me to be able to have that happen.

TM: Looking at some of the ground we need to cover here, I want to make sure we touch on some of these key areas. In terms of wildlife management, say a word or two on Canada Geese re-introduction. Also talk about your role with the Trumpeter Swan re-introduction, because that certainly has to be one of the real satisfying achievements that you were involved with. We should also talk about deer management. You know, there's a lot of effort that went into re-introduction, but there's the other side of that too.

DW: A lot of the programs that you mentioned, aside from maybe deer management, were underway when I came on via Robley. The Canada goose business is "let's get the Canada Geese in here because they're a very visible species of wildlife that the public will be interested in seeing." So, Canada Geese being Canada Geese, they took over. I think maybe there are a lot of people in the Twin Cities area that can thank Hennepin Parks for

the number of Canada Geese that are now in the area. But, it was just one of those things that we felt, gave us kind of a jump start in our restoration of native wildlife species. Of course, it's evolved to the point now where there has to be control. Jim Cooper with the University of Minnesota has his "Goose Busters Incorporated" that is involved with that. But, we can take credit, or be embarrassed by the fact, that we did that.

With Trumpeter Swans, Fred King, who was the Chairman of our Board of Commissioners, was keen on having the District particularly involved with the restoration of a species that would be kind of "the marquis," the icon of our efforts to restore wildlife to the Twin Cities area. He had grand visions of buffalo being that species. He was in touch with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, particularly Ray St. Ores, and the regional director, whose name escapes me at the moment, to enable this to happen. Ray and the regional director talked Fred out of bison. He said, "You don't know what you're getting into. Your fence posts can't be just fence posts, they've got to be telephone poles in order to keep them in." That was when they suggested, and got Fred interested in, restoring Trumpeter Swans to the area. As you know, it's evolved to where it's been a grand success. We started with birds coming from Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Montana in 1966 and evolved from there. It was initially Robley's management plan to just bring birds in as cygnets, young birds, and then allow them to fly free and come back. Well, that didn't work too well. Then Larry Gillette came on board in 1973 as Wildlife Manager and it was his work, his management that really made for a successful re-introduction of Trumpeter Swans. That being -- get yourself some adult pairs, maintain them in a flightless state in a refuge situation, allow them to nest and bring off young, and then allow those young to fly free. That's how it evolved and became the success that it is to the point where the State of Minnesota, the DNR, got on board and had their restoration program. I think it's safe to say that the restoration program in Minnesota is a success. There are free-flying nesting Trumpeter Swans in Minnesota. It's even come to the point of becoming a problem in the wintertime.

TM: In terms of significant numbers.

DW: In significant numbers to the point where we have to do something differently than what we're doing on the Mississippi River in the wintertime, feeding these birds. They've got to be encouraged to fly south. In a nutshell, there's a lot more to it than that, but it becomes successful.

As far as the deer are concerned, early on we recognized that the Park District was a series of park reserves that were somewhat islands unto themselves. Once you establish a boundary and manage for the natural resources in an area and you have development occurring up to the boundary of the park reserve, the park reserve has become an island and the deer stay somewhat within it to a degree. You have the population dynamics, a carrying capacity in that area that can support just so many deer. Then they start eating themselves out of house and home so to speak. The food resource becomes depleted, because they have exceeded that carrying capacity. They go above the line that equals the carrying capacity and realize more numbers, but then they'll crash a bit because food resources are depleted and they go below that line. Then the food resources recover and the line goes back up, and so on and on. We recognized the need to control that population, if the vegetative resource was going to be diverse and supportive of other wildlife species. So, a deer management plan was developed. Larry was the primary author of that plan and, of course, with me and Tim Dyhr, the Natural Resources Wildlife Technician. We thought we'd work with the State DNR in developing this plan and came up with what we thought was a fairly definitive and well thought-out plan. Well, you ask, "What about the animal rights people and how would they feel about this?" But we developed this plan completely above board, on top of the table; it was public knowledge. The only people to ask to see that plan was a sewing circle near Baker Park Reserve. There was a group of women who got together and, essentially the old-fashioned type, who wanted to see it. They looked at it, read it, had no complaints, and that was it. As they say, the rest is history. But, it was a very viable, very workable plan and it continues to this

day. We work with local municipalities on how it's best to work. We close down a park reserve for a day or two. We have a shotgun-only hunt that's worked on a lottery basis and it's worked perfectly well. In Hyland Lake Park Reserve, where it's a more urban park reserve, we went to sharpshooting. At Crow Hassan Park Reserve, which isn't quite as developed, we used archery hunts.

TM: And I think the rough patches, if there were any, were probably in the '80s and early '90s, but certainly it appears now that municipalities have gotten on board. They look to the Park District as the folks that perhaps saw the need far well before the cities did.

DW: That was our job as natural resources managers, damn it [laughing].

TM: Yes, and it's been very well implemented and accepted. During your tenure, did the need for natural resources management expand beyond forestry and wildlife management to include water quality? When was that apparent?

DW: You took the words right out of my mouth. That's another thing I feel very good about, the hiring of John Barten. Just as we got into water milfoil and the water quality managing issues such as related to our golf courses, we felt the need. Up until the implementation of that program, we were dealing with Hickok and Associates in Wayzata as our tester of water samples and how water was being blasphemed, if you will, in many areas like farm water run-off or golf course run-off, whatever. We were able to sell the Board and Superintendent on the need for water quality. We often look at the Trumpeter Swan as kind of the barometer of water quality. If a swan will utilize a wetland, water quality is usually pretty good, but if you see a diminishment of wetland use, wildlife, swans in particular, you've got to be concerned that there is something else in the woodwork that is creating some problems. We had to be on top of that, we really did. You'd get communities like on... not Lake Rebecca, but to the east of Lake Rebecca.

TM: Lake Sarah.

DW: Lake Sarah was a big concern as far as water quality on the part of the residents around the lake. We had some property on Lake Sarah and the residents were concerned

over what we were going to do about it as a Park Reserve. John was on top of that taking water quality samples and making recommendations as to what needed to be done to improve the water quality. You start getting algal blooms and things like that. Then there were problems that we needed to address if we were going to be good stewards of the wetlands and the natural resources associated with those wetlands.

TM: One of the things you mentioned, and it's still a discussion topic today, is the plant community concept idea and how it used circa 1850 as a target. Lots of discussions have occurred over the years within natural resources management in the organization in terms of "where did that come from?" How valid of a target is it? I found in my time with the Park District that it's been a source of frustration in terms of trying to either defend or even explain why it's been a worthy tool over the years. How did the circa 1850 come about? Was it something that had been identified from some other agency or other natural resources management effort? Or was it apparent circa 1850 really is the point at which the landscape disruption occurred with the influx of Euro-American agriculture? I mean was it as simple as that?

DW: I think all of the above. It's evolved. It was, as I say, "on board." It was a criterion established before I got there, I'm sure through planners and Robley. I think the business of Europeans coming, breaking the sod and creating agricultural property was also probably a driving force. The maple-basswood forest, what was the extent of it back then, supported the native wildlife inventory, if you will, that was present. It was kind of an objective place to go to. You wanted to have something to work toward and you didn't want to exacerbate non-native species of vegetation that might not be supportive of what we're looking for in the way of wildlife. As it evolved, it became apparent that this was a very good way to go in that we were then able to identify invasive species. Because of various practices of farming which are still going on today and with other things, you get the leafy spurge, the loosestrife, Eurasian water milfoil, and whatever. But, we had a foundation with which to

work and to say, "Hey, this doesn't belong here and I think we ought to make some effort to remove it."

TM: I think what has been frustrating is when someone encounters the circa 1850 idea for the first time. There's sometimes a tendency for them to perceive that this is a snap-shot that we're aiming at, or that there is an assumption that we're trying to recreate 1850. So, the questions come up, "Well why not 1880 or why not 1900?" I continue to offer up that it really is a target that we aim at, knowing full well that we're not able to, nor would we even want to necessarily accomplish it. It would be naïve of us to think that. But, I think that it's one of the things that is one of the greatest challenges; that as time goes on, as we get further from 1850, it becomes more and more difficult for people to really get their head around why that was a target in the first place.

DW: Well, I look at it as offering a guideline. Yes, you're not going to get it 100 percent perfect and the business of restoring native prairie never, never, never, will we ever get the same prairie back. It's just impossible. We'll never ever, it's just not going to happen, but at least we're making an effort and gaining some semblance of what that kind of community looked like and it provides an example. You know, we get into this business of having contractors. What's the term? They've got to give a horse for a horse when they're going to be filling in a wetland to accomplish it.

TM: Wetland mitigation.

DW: Yes, the mitigation and things. To think that you could possibly establish or revamp a wetland on top where there never was a wetland, it isn't going to happen. It just isn't going to happen. But in our efforts to do the circa 1850 bit, we were at least working in areas that were once that way and not trying to create something entirely new from what it was not before.

TM: Yes, I often times try to explain that it's really our job to identify what all of nature's building blocks were back in 1850. When we see one fall off the table, well we toss it back up on the table. We don't presume to know exactly how it would fit in.

DW: And, of course, from 1850, man's influence aside, there's going to be a progression, an evolution to something entirely different over time. I mean the maple-basswood forest isn't going to be there forever, nor is a wetland. A wetland is a wetland in the Park District system, because we're maintaining it as a wetland. It's an example of a habitat that is very important to the support of many different species of wildlife and vegetation. But, the natural progression, the succession is going to be from open water to floating vegetation, to emergent vegetation, and eventually to dry land and associated plant species. Over time there's going to be a dry site. There's not going to be any wet there at all, because it's filled in. The only way we keep it that way is to get a drag-line in there every now and then.

TM: Yes, and to bring some of that disturbance about. This is a different topic completely, but I wanted to provide you an opportunity to editorialize perhaps. You mentioned Fred King early on with some of our early Commissioners and their involvement and understanding of what a natural resources-based park system was all about. What beget the mission or direction of the Park District that attracted individuals who had an understanding and a desire to be part of this effort to establish a unique natural resources-based park system? Was it the vision of the early Board members that shaped the direction or was it a little bit of both? I guess the editorial comment would be in your time with the Park District, what was the interface with the Board in terms of their awareness early on at the time when you left the Park District? Had it evolved? Certainly the direction, support and success of the Park District is very much dependent on the policy-makers' awareness and understanding of what we're all about.

DW: That's a good question Tom. Early on we had a smaller Board, did we not? I'm not sure, or maybe even larger, now it's smaller.

TM: Actually, at one point, we had 11 members.

DW: But all of those individuals, Russ Zakariasen, Fred King, Howard Baker, and I'm seeing faces and not remembering names, a lot of them were sportsmen. Fred King's passion was

waterfowl hunting. I think each one of them brought some of that to the Board, into their thinking on how the Park District might evolve and that was natural resources-based. It seems to me, staff had a bit more access to individual Board members. I think they even sought us out with Clif's blessing, I really do. You know, Fred was number one. He got the Trumpeter Swan restoration going and he was the founder of The Trumpeter Swan Society. As that founder and first president, Robley and I had very close relationships with him. There was always discussion going on about what was happening for the natural resources management end of things. They were all keenly interested on how things were going with Dutch Elm Disease control, how the wetlands were being restored and so forth. I have a feeling they were a bit more involved, at least from an interest stand-point, on how we were managing things, then they are today. I may be speaking out of context, but after all, I've been gone almost 20 years. I just think that with Clif's keen interest in seeing the Park District come to fruition, as he was such a passionate guy, and because he was so involved with the Board, I think he permitted a reasonable amount of affiliation between staff and the Board within reason. I think that had a lot to do with the formulation of what the District is today really, as it should be. Later Boards, obviously, wanted to bring their stamp of their effect on things. But, if I'm hearing you correctly, and I'm not that closely in touch, it sounds like we have gone from a very strong emphasis on natural resources management in the early going, to a bit less in the Doug Bryant era, to coming back to it under Cris Gears. Am I right in that regard?

TM: Yes, I think so.

DW: And that pleases me to no end. There were times I actually called Judith Anderson and said, "Hey, what's going on?" because I saw the 80/20 policy in jeopardy, the natural resources management policy in jeopardy. I don't know if I've answered your question. We as a staff, not all staff, sat in on Board meetings. We in the natural resources end, as director of the department, or the manager of wildlife and forestry, or even when invited of course, sat in just to see how things went and to be able to answer questions.

TM: I sense from your description of the earlier days that there was an understanding at the Board level. There were people that were keenly interested in natural resources management who were on the Board. Staff did not feel the need to commit a lot of time to educating the Board about what the basics of natural resources management was all about. As the Park District has evolved, I think it's only

DW: It's more of a chore.

TM: understandable perhaps, that you would get individuals whose motivation would be something other than that.

DW: Excuse me, but not to say or denigrate the following Commissioners, because there were many Commissioners who were very keen on natural resources and sought us out to explain things and to show them in the field what was going on.

TM: Well, there's certainly been Commissioners who have been passionate about recreation, or passionate about the public access in natural areas for a variety of reasons. I mean, on an individual basis, certainly some were probably more concerned about the protection end of things and others may have been more concerned about providing public access. The mission itself wasn't established or hammered-out in its current state until 1983. Was there a sense of what the mission was all along and at some point someone said, "You know, we really should . . .

DW: put this in writing?

TM:put this in writing?" Was everybody using the enabling legislation as the guideline?

DW: Pretty much the latter I think. I don't recall a mission per se. I came on board and Robley read me the edicts of wildlife management and how we were going to proceed. Sometimes it wasn't necessarily supported by certain members of the staff. So, we kind of had to back-pedal every now and then to justify what we were doing. From a mission standpoint, I think generally we all felt that this is going to be a natural resources-based system, but, obviously, recreationally oriented, and how do we best achieve that? We started working with the 80/20 policy and were able to work with each other to do so,

knowing that we were supporting each other in that endeavor. But as far as the mission, I don't recall specifically that there was a mission per se.

TM: One of the things that I believe is attributed to you is the continuum of plant community concepts across the park reserve system in terms of forested versus open space. One way to accomplish a variety of plant communities throughout the system would be to have a park reserve that is the most forested and likewise at the other end of the spectrum, a park reserve that maintains the most open space. We've talked recreationally about wanting to make sure that our park reserves are not cookie cutter replicas of each other. So, I think one of the things that is attributed to your tenure is the effort to make sure that the plant community concepts that were pursued were not cookie cutter replicas as well.

DW: Right. I don't know that it could be attributed just to me, but the synergy of wildlife management, forest management, of Larry, Tom, and me. I think there's always a battle going on between Tom and Larry on what ought to be. There were certain areas that were more logically, and perhaps most appropriately, from a soil stand point or whatever it would be, grassland versus forested and vice versa. I don't necessarily remember any strong conscious effort to make a continuum, but certainly we wanted to have a variety. We didn't want to have everything forested or everything grassland. I think there was some effort in that endeavor to assure that there was habitat for a greater variety of bird species, of wildlife in general and vegetation. I don't remember specifically that there was a

TM:.....a purposeful one, two, three, four, across the system.

DW: And it may well have been. Larry and Tom may correct me on that, but I think it turned out pretty well.

TM: Now that it is in place and as time goes on, we're seeing some really positive rewards occurring for the work that was done. Work that was started in the '70s and carried on through the '80s and '90s are just recently starting to bear fruit.

DW: Realizing their maturity?

TM: Yes. If I remember right, of the extirpated species, the first successful was nesting of Bald Eagles in Hennepin County, 1996.

DW: Was that down in [Lake] Zumbra?

TM: That was at [Lake] Katrina or Elm Creek?

DW: No, I thought it was in Carver [Park Reserve], maybe not.

TM: Could be. The Sandhill Crane is another one. The first successful nesting of the extirpated Sandhill Cranes. It happened in 1996 up on Powers Lake at Elm Creek. And now I heard the other day from John Moriarty, who flew the aerial survey of the Mississippi River corridor, that there are 24 Bald Eagle nests just on the Mississippi corridor

DW: In the Minneapolis area?

TM: In the Minneapolis area.

DW: That's fantastic!

TM: It's just outstanding, the success.

DW: What you're seeing reminds me of, and Larry once again being the primary motivator, how successful the Osprey restoration is.

TM: And now, of course, for people to look up and see an Osprey is common place. Bald Eagles were pretty much the same way. There are some wonderful success stories and those were things that I think people believed would occur. A lot of those have happened since you were there; certainly the groundwork that was started in the '70s carried on and is finally bearing fruit. On the other end of the spectrum, there are some things that, for all of our management efforts, blind-sided us as well. There are natural resource management dilemmas that we're never sure whether or not we're going to be successful. There are things like the non-native earthworm impact, which has a dramatic effect on the landscape. We're kind of at a loss on that.

DW: I don't know if there's anything you can do.

TM: Anything you can do.

DW: Right.

TM: So, we take the successes where we can.

DW: Of course, one of the imperatives in the wildlife management, natural resources management realm is that once you've re-established or restored something, you're going to have to work on maintaining it. You can't just let it go, because then you're going to be un-doing all of the time, effort, and the money that's gone into re-establishing it. It's just like infrastructure of highways or buildings. You've got to maintain them or else they're going to fall apart.

TM: Hopefully future decision-making will be very cognizant of the time and public financial investment that's been made in establishing some of these things. You know, I always point out; think how long it takes to grow a mature tree. Reforestation efforts should not be taken lightly in terms of future decision-making. I think that's probably our challenge in terms of interfacing with future Boards and policy-makers as well.

I just looked at the clock. We've been talking for over an hour now. Anything that you'd like to add that you thought we would cover that we haven't? Anything that you could offer up in terms of some of your fondest memories, most significant accomplishments, or things you were glad to be part of?

DW: Well, I don't know. Not really. It was just my first job, if you will. First "real" job out of graduate school and it was one that was just entirely fun. I mean it was a pleasure. It was so much fun to see the efforts and management of these natural resources come to fruition. It was such a pleasure to work with so many dedicated people. I mean people who are real professionals in the planning end of things and the natural resources end of things. It was very, very satisfying to see that all happen. And when I left Hennepin Parks in the end of June of 1990, I went simply because I felt it was time to go. I had a good job in the offing with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. But when I left, I said, "Gee, you know, I've got to keep an eye on this thing and see how it goes." I got unhappy with the way things were going, but I'm very pleased that they've kind of taken a little bit of an about-face and are back on track. I just hope that it continues, because there are too many

people who spent their careers and lives implementing a natural resources-based outdoor recreation park system. We can't deviate from that in my opinion. I mean that's what makes it a unique system. It's known country-wide and it's one of the better, if not the best, park system. Of course, it's the only one of its kind in the country. It's amazing and I think that the use figures will bear that out.

TM: Absolutely, that's true. Actually, the latest Metro Council survey indicated that we are approaching seven million user occasions annually.

DW: Annually! Good grief! That's amazing.

TM: Who would have ever thought?

DW: That's amazing and I hope with not adverse impact on the natural resources. But, to have worked with Dick Haskett, Larry Gillette, Tom Jahnke, Tim Dyhr, John Moriarty, Charlie Evenson, John Barten, and I shouldn't go on because I will not name everybody, but what a crew. What wonderfully dedicated, smart people. It's just been fun and I wish the best for the Park District in the years to come, and hopefully, don't lose sight of the mission.

TM: Well thank you very much for taking the time.

DW: It's been a pleasure. Thank you for coming all of the way to Massachusetts for this.

TM: Thanks for all your hospitality.

**Ray Haik
Former Legal Counsel for
Three Rivers Park District
Narrator**

**Margie Dahlof
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer**

**August 4, 2011
at Silverwood Park
St. Anthony, Minnesota**

MD: The topic of our interview is the history of Three Rivers Park District, specifically Ray's involvement with the Park District as Legal Counsel. So Ray, tell me a little bit about yourself. Are you originally from Minnesota or the Twin Cities area?

RH: I'm originally from Minnesota. I'm a Northeast boy and that's where I've been all my life. I live now about eight blocks from where I was born down off of 8th Street and University. My Dad had his store right in the corner of Main Street and East Hennepin.

MD: What store was your Dad's?

RH: It was a General Store. He came in the 1890s. He came back with my Mother in 1922. So, I've lived in Northeast--I'm a Northeast boy.

MD: And then for a while you said you lived near here at Silverwood Park.

RH: When I got married, we bought a home in St. Anthony Village and we lived there initially on 30th [Avenue], but then we moved up on Silver Lake. I was in the Village for [approximately] thirty-five years.

MD: Wow. Tell me a little bit about your educational background.

RH: My parents were immigrants and most of my friends in Northeast were a variety of nationalities. Just like in our home, they spoke the foreign language at home. My friends primarily were Swedes and Norwegians because we lived closed to them, but there were [also] Italians, people from church. I used to play for Trinity Methodist, but then I also played . . .

MD: What did you play, music?

RH: Oh no, basketball. We played down at the Nut House, a Northeast neighborhood house that had what they call a youth organization. What I liked about Northeast [is that my friends] were mostly first generation, their parents [were] immigrants. Most of my close friends were Italians, Polish boys, Swedes and Norwegians.

MD: So you obviously went to Minneapolis Public Schools to start with?

RH: I went to Prescott School and then Edison High School. After I graduated I was seventeen and the war was ending. Albert, my brother, was overseas in the Pacific for a little over three years. My Dad had died in 1928, so my Mother really raised us. We were young. I was only eight [years old] when my Dad died. I had a sister [who was] four [years old], my older brother was twelve [years old], and [my other] sister [was] ten [years old]. My Mother really was a factor . . . she wasn't going to sign for me [to enter military service] because I was only seventeen, but my brother persuaded her. That was a good thing for me. I went in the service the summer of 1946. I was sent to Korea, came home in January of 1948, and started school at the University of Minnesota.

MD: And then you did undergrad[uate work] at the University of Minnesota--did you do your law degree there?

RH: Yes. Bachelor of Science in Law and a Law degree right at 1953. That's where I met my partners, Wayne Popham and Roger Schnobrich. In 1949 we were at the Law School and that's particularly with Wayne Popham, he was a farm boy. [With] both of us in it, it's like the law business now--there are always more lawyers than there are jobs. It's really tough. So we said we were going to start our own law firm. They hadn't been in the service so when the Korean War broke out, they had to go in. We opened our office in 1958.

MD: In 1958.

RH: The Foshay Tower was the biggest building and we were in the National Building right where the Pillsbury Center was--they've changed those names around. We practiced there, and we had a good . . .

MD: You had a good practice.

RH: A good practice, yes.

MD: Then you left that practice for a while to go in the private sector and then come back?

RH: Well, I did a lot primarily from my natural resource environmental work. My first job was really with the Attorney General's Office. I was very fortunate. J.A.A. Burnquist was the Attorney General. He was the Governor of the state [of Minnesota from] 1918 to 1921 or 1922. He became the Attorney General after hard times in the Depression, when Harold Stassen got elected Governor of Minnesota in 1938. Those are appointed jobs. When I went through law school, I started working at the Soo Line Railroad which was only two blocks from where we lived. I worked when I was sixteen, I was still in high school and they were still hiring.

MD: At the railroad?

RH: Yes, because of the war. When I came back from the service, I went back to work, which was a great job because I had a variety of jobs--the freight house, and then I got the job of yard clerk, going out in the yard when you have to check the trains. That was a great job.

MD: Did you have that job through school then?

RH: All of the way, yes, through law school. Eleven at night, seven in the morning in the latter parts. We'd meet at Gray's Drugstore, Wayne and I, on the campus in Dinkytown. A carafe of coffee and two glazed donuts for twenty-five cents [Both laugh]. But we were two young guys and Roger was a friend, he was from St. Cloud. So in 1958 we opened up [our law firm]. Roger was working as an accountant as well as a lawyer with his brother. He joined us about a year later. We had a very [good practice], and we started from nothing.

MD: Yes, and made a good firm.

RH: We made a good firm. Yes.

MD: Highly reputable. I see that you made it into one of the premier environmental law firms.

RH: And that all came from my first job. My first job was the Department of Conservation. U. W. Hella was the head of the State Park Division and the division of waters, the minerals, the forestry, the game and fish, those were all . . .

MD: Now, Dick Dorer was the wildlife?

RH: Dick Dorer, he was in the section of game.

MD: Section of game, yes.

RH: And Ed Franey was a very . . . through that job, anyway, the forestry, that's where I met all these people . . .

MD: These environmentalists.

RH: . . . and so I joined the Wildlife Society and their organizations and then I joined the Izaak Walton League, they were after me to join and I . . .

MD: . . . and you eventually became President.

RH: I became State Division President and National President, but what I had was the experience of working on game and fish, minerals division. That's where I met these people. I am not a hunter or fisherman but they took a big interest in me . . .

MD: So you developed an appreciation of these things.

RH: . . . and then I started to do the work. When I was in the Attorney General's Office I would draft, in those days the Attorney General's staff would draft the bills for the legislators regardless of their, now they have . . .

MD: Revisor's Offices and [so forth].

RH: . . . big staff, yes. But at that time, you just drafted the bills. So I got to know Senator [Gordon] Rosenmeier, Senator [Donald] Sinclair, the early people, and [Minnesota's] Commissioner of Conservation Chester Wilson was a lawyer, just a wonderful man. Then when [Minnesota's Attorney General] Miles Lord and the Democrats came in 1957, that would be two years after 1955, Orville Freeman [unclear]. Well, there were a lot of my classmates that were going to go in to work because these were appointed jobs . . .

MD: Yes, because they were appointed jobs, right.

RH: . . . you serve at the pleasure of the Attorney General. I remember when I got interviewed by Attorney General Burnquist, who was an old line Republican, he was just a wonderful guy. I had just seen at the law school, they used to have a bulletin board and it said "Clerk wanted in the Attorney General's Office". I went over there and the guy interviewed me. I had taken the Bar exam. The fellow [who interviewed me] was Burwell, he was a lawyer at the Department of Conservation. He said, "Well, we really wanted somebody who was admitted to the Bar." I had just taken the Bar exam and you've got to wait about six months [to get the results]. He said, "Well, I really want somebody who probably has a law degree and can practice." But he took my name. Meanwhile, there are no jobs around and so I'm still working at the railroad. He called in August and said, "Nobody else has applied, come over here." So I had to go back over and he said, "You've got to go see the [Attorney] General." I've never been in the Capitol or anything [Laughing]. I had a bike, you know, I didn't have a car, I was on a bike. I went over and sat around, waiting for the appointment with the [Attorney] General and he told me to call him "General".

MD: Call him General, okay.

RH: He was the nicest guy, I mean he really just . . .

MD: Wow, and this was Burnquist?

RH: J.A.A. Burnquist, a really nice guy. He didn't ask me whether I had good grades or whatever, [he asked], "Where are you from?" I told him I'm a Northeast boy. I just told him what I'm telling you. He said, "Well, you seem like a nice young man. But I've got one more question, what are your politics?"

MD: Oooh [Both laugh].

RH: So I said, "General, where I live everybody is a Democrat," which is true [unclear statement] . . .

MD: Yes, you're Northeast, yes.

RH: . . . "So I guess I'm a Democrat". In those days, if you were a state employee I think you couldn't run for a local office, [but] you had to keep your nose out of politics. He said, "Well, if you keep your nose out of politics then you've got a job--two hundred dollars a month and if you pass the Bar, you get fifty dollars more." So I started out at two-hundred fifty dollars a month.

MD: A month, wow.

RH: It was the best thing that ever happened to me because I immediately got into the courtroom. I got in to learn all about forestry, game and fish, the Minerals Division, waters. Early in the water pollution control effort was the Department of Agriculture, the Secretary, Commissioner of Health and the Commissioner of Conservation [unclear]. Their interest was of somebody getting sick, you know, diseases . . .

MD: Yes, from drinking water more than anything.

RH: Yes, but then, Dick Dorer and those, I did their work. I remember, when I got there, I just went right to work, you know.

MD: Great, what a learning [experience].

RH: I remember at Christmas I got a . . . I never met Dick Dorer, you know, they just were bringing his work in, just checking abstracts and going into the courtroom and starting the first fights to when they had judicial drainage ditches, which was a big part of developing the agricultural base of our state. The department, Dick Dorer, Ed Franey and the Izaak Walton League had started the "Save our Wetlands" program which was a program started in Minnesota conceived by those two men and the Izaak Walton League. I would go with them when they'd meet at the Game and Fish clubs which were the support for getting hunters and fishermen interested. We'd sell those buttons "Save the Wetlands" [for] a dollar a button. [We] then persuaded the legislature, drafted the legislation to provide for some more stringent rules and . . .

MD: Restrictions.

RH: Before you run a drainage ditch through a wetland that the state had acquired for wildlife habitat, they would actually also be assessed to pay for the drainage ditch, so there was a conflict.

MD: Yes. I remember . . .

RH: But there the focus was on reclamation of wetlands for agriculture.

MD: Reclamation of wetlands for agriculture.

RH: I mean, it's a proper thing, but now the focus was turning to, well, "these are important features in our State. We don't need to drain everything." So, my early cases were the fight for changes in the drainage code that required a more stringent look at.

MD: Yes. I remember at the Park District, our early years were a lot of wetland creation.

RH: Oh, absolutely.

MD: Tons of wetland creation. I remember talking to some of the maintenance guys [and] that was what they did--Robley Hunt, [Dave] Weaver and Larry Gillette.

RH: Oh sure, the sedimentation bays of the north [unclear]. I would go out and condemn these meadows that flooded. Northern pike fry, they spawned in what we call the meadows, then [as] the water receded, the fry would go back into the lake.

MD: Into the lake.

RH: So, we were out condemning all these little wetlands around a variety of lakes and I was out doing that work. That's where I in a [unclear] park division and Judge Hella who was writing their regulations, handling the acquisitions. I was involved with Dick Dorer at acquiring and condemning property down in the White Water Valley, White Water State Park, the White Water Refuge, the old town of Beaver that was just covered with silt. Through the Park, my first experience was with the State Park Division.

MD: With the State Park Division.

RH: And Justice Magney. There was this park association, the [Judge C. R.] Magney State [Park] . . .

MD: Oh and that's who Magney was--Judge Magney Park. I was just up there last week.

RH: . . . up there on the north shore.

MD: I was just there last week.

RH: Of course, just like anything, I was getting a great deal of experience. I was in the courtroom condemning the property, or I was in the courtroom to fight for changes in judicial ditch projects that were going to run through. Initially we didn't do too well because the law favored that . . .

MD: The developers.

RH: . . . but, the farmers were in a rush to reclaim [their property]. I drafted some of the early laws that put in an additional requirement or other alternatives. After that, my friends who were in law school were practicing all around the state in the smaller towns. Ed Franey, who is in this book [reference on table], he was the sports editor for the Star Tribune. He was the first outdoor TV personality . . .

MD: Oh, the outdoor guy, yes.

RH: . . . and he and Gordy Michaelson, who was with WCCO . . .

MD: WCCO, yes, I remember those names, okay.

RH: . . . he was active in the Izaak Walton League. I can think of a couple of cases, [unclear] Lake, different ones. I was doing that work pro bono for the Izaak Walton League and the Conservation Federation, the Game and Fish. If we had a good result, I would just call in to Ed Franey and say, "Well, we won this case, the judge isn't going to . . ." Ed was the Associated Press . . .

MD: AP.

RH: AP. He would put it on the wire and Gordy Michaelson would make sure

MD: It got in the news. So he had all the marketing parts [unclear].

RH: . . . as man of the day I was on WCCO a couple of times.

RH: These [people] were all active [in] trying to spread the word that wetlands were important and parks were important.

MD: So how did you get to the Park District? Was it *you* that they brought into the Park District or your firm? Do you remember that time period? I think I have it, but I'm not sure.

RH: Chester Wilson was the Commissioner of Conservation when I first went to work, but then the Democrats took over. George Selke--he became very close to me and I to him--he was very helpful. What happened was I was doing their work and Chester--he was a lawyer in Stillwater and he had come from there--he had gotten some of these cases where he would bring me in and I would work with him. He was an older man, but he was active [unclear] when he was Commissioner of Conservation. He was a great guy. So, [to] the park people, I was a known quantity in . . .

MD: In the park group so those people. . .

RH: . . . and our firm, we did do municipal work, I was city. We did legal work for some of the municipalities and I did work for a variety of them.

MD: Did you know a [Park District] Commissioner or did Clif [French] seek you out or how did that work?

RH: What happened [was], the watershed program was a program that was developed when I was in the Attorney General's office . . .

MD: Yes, and you had a lot to do with it, right.

RH: . . . I drafted that legislation, worked with Senator Rosenmeier and then I represented it. My first effort in that regard was Bassett's Creek that comes in, that ends up in the big pipe and goes under the, you know, and we should never, it wouldn't happen then. Nine Mile Creek was then starting to develop--Edina and Eden Prairie. The Hennepin County Attorney's Office, John Harvey, he did the civil work for the . . . he called me and [asked if] I would try to work with a group of people to get a watershed district created for Nine Mile Creek Watershed and then the lower Minnesota River Watershed. That was a project where they dredged the Minnesota River so they could take barges out instead of having to come up through the system. I took on that assignment. Then the next thing you know, that

worked out successfully and then pretty soon I ended up with . . . I was going to ask you about the different parks, but then out of the blue, Clif French called me. I had joined the Chamber of Commerce Natural Resources Commission.

MD: Okay. Was Clif on that?

RH: No he wasn't, but Wayne [Popham] was active and we were active in the [unclear]. I wasn't, but I was known as a lawyer who knew something about water and parks and condemnation . . .

MD: Yes, and acquiring land.

RH: . . . and acquiring land. That's what I was hired for. [When] you're condemning the property, people don't like it when you do it, so I used to say, "Well if you can condemn land for buildings, you can condemn land." So, that got me started. You name a park in the metropolitan area, in the early years, I was just trying to think about some, Fort Snelling State Park . . .

MD: How about Baker? Did you do Elm Creek? Baker? Carver? Lake Rebecca? What were some of those?

RH: I did Elm Creek. I started out in the Carver County area.

MD: Okay, so here we are at Carver Park [Pointing to map].

RH: Yes, that was the first one. Batzli was the name of the man. Now I just remembered, there was a community out there, either Germans or Swiss.

MD: Victoria, Chanhassen, Chaska.

RH: Yes, in that area. Batzli was the name of the owner, but that started it. That was in Carver County.

MD: Did you end up having to actually do condemnation or were you able to purchase? Were you able to negotiate?

RH: We started it, but we primarily negotiated. But that led then to, you know, there was a lot of competition going on in the park [about] who was going to be the top dog in the park.

MD: Okay, I didn't [know], okay.

RH: Hennepin County had the tax base and they were starting to say . . . well, and what Clif French and [Larry] Haeg and the Board told me [was], "We want to capture these open space areas and put enough of them under so they'll be open to everybody." Which was . . .

MD: In the region, everybody in the region, so they were thinking big.

RH: Yes. At the same time I was handling the condemnation for . . .

MD: Murphy-Hanrehan?

RH: No.

MD: No? Which one?

RH: For Fort Snelling State Park.

MD: Oh, Fort Snelling, which would be over that way a little more [Pointing to map].

RH: Yes. But that was probably the last state park in the metropolitan area. The State Park Division wanted parks in the [metro area]. Fort Snelling State Park was combined with the project that involved the dredging of the Minnesota River up to Savage. During that process, where they re-aligned the river and dredged it for navigation so they could ship the grain out rather than coming up and sending it through the [locks]. You know, we had a lot of grain coming out of Northeast Minneapolis and elsewhere. We coordinated that work, which I was handling for the watershed district with the state park development acquisition. [It] then ended up with that great park that's down there.

MD: The Fort Snelling [Park]. And then the other park, now along the river, the Feds got that, right?

RH: Well, then the Feds came much later.

MD: Much later, yes.

RH: The Feds wanted to have a program, which from my viewpoint I [thought] we were capable of doing that.

MD: Yes, without the Feds.

RH: You see, what was happening with the Feds, some of their programs were going south because they weren't getting the money. [But] the drainage programs and the wetlands program conceived in Minnesota--they eventually adopted it.

MD: For national wetlands.

RH: Yes, but we were first in the nation and we were the ones who conceived it. By we, I mean Dick Dorer and [so forth]. Fort Snelling State Park, I think, that was a big one and I had represented a park to [unclear]. Then the Nine Mile Creek started in saving the open spaces and the others, but then for the Park District, when they called me up, they were starting out here [Pointing to map].

MD: Did you work with [Don] Cochran or was . . .

RH: Well yes, Cochran, but I worked directly with Clif, yes. Then, Robley Hunt was there and [unclear]. We had to negotiate. There was resentment, you know, the counties weren't too receptive to having people come out in their backyard. I'd go to the county board meetings and work with them.

MD: With the Carver County Board meetings.

RH: Carver County, yes.

MD: Because they didn't want Hennepin County people in their county.

RH: Yes. And then Scott County, Murphy-Hanrehan . . .

MD: Murphy Hanrehan down here [Pointing to map]. You must have worked with George Muenchow.

RH: Yes, George, oh yeah, George.

MD: Isn't George a sweetheart?

RH: And then through the watershed district, we helped with Shakopee. There was a park just on the edge of Shakopee.

MD: Yes, over here, The Landing or something?

RH: That's where they have the old time Germans in Murphy's Landing.

MD: Murphy's Landing, yes.

MD: Yes, and we own that now, the Park District.

RH: Oh yes. I was one of the early ones there through the watershed district and Margaret McFarland, she was an early schoolteacher down there. I worked with her, raised money for her, and got the watershed district in there. That's a great . . .

MD: Yes. We took that over because they just financially weren't . . .

RH: Couldn't do it.

MD: . . . couldn't do it, but we got it reserved now.

RH: Sure, and we got the, you know, the German [town].

MD: It's beautiful, yes, and you should see our Master Plan for that place, Ray, it's beautiful.

RH: So, I worked on that one.

MD: Okay. That's good to know because when we do some development we should invite you down for that.

RH: Oh, I used to go down when they used to have their annual Fall Festival . . .

MD: Oh yes.

RH: . . . where they take the groceries that came from the farm crops.

MD: And we have the Christmas show down there, the Folkways of [the Holidays] every year.

RH: Then there was another park over here in [Pointing to map]. Then we negotiated with Dakota County too.

MD: Okay.

RH: The guy, I forget the name.

MD: Oh, the guy who was the Director of Dakota County?

RH: No, he was a layman, he was an active businessman in Savage.

MD: Okay, I probably wouldn't know him.

RH: He was helpful. What is that park down there?

MD: Lebanon Hills?

RH: It was one of those down there, I don't know.

MD: Yes, I think Dakota County's big, big park is Lebanon Hills.

RH: Yes, but they kept it, yes.

MD: Yes, they've got it.

RH: But then, I really ended my career with them . . .

MD: How about any other Three Rivers parks, or Hennepin County parks--did you work on Elm Creek at all or Crow [-Hassan] or [Lake] Rebecca?

RH: What happened there was, when highway departments were coming in, the next thing you know, we get Eddie Gearty who was the [Minneapolis] Park Board's Attorney. [He was] a good friend. When he was in the legislature from the North side, we would cover for him, but it was primarily labor work [unclear]. But then the freeway system was coming in and there was a lot of, from my viewpoint, upset, with how the first freeway that came in which was [I-]394. It came in there right by Spring Lake and how they divided the . . .

MD: [Pointing at map] Right in, is this [I-]94?

RH: . . . yes, and how they came down through the Parade . . .

MD: [Highway] 12, yes.

RH: . . . and divided the Loring Park from the Parade Stadium . . .

MD: Yes, over in here, the Parade Stadium, yes.

RH: . . . and there's that little Spring Lake in there, and the Park Administrator, Bob Ruhe . . .

MD: Bob Ruhe, yes.

RH: . . . a fantastic guy, in my mind. So the highway department was taking and acquiring the land and paying, you know, nominal money and we came up with . . . He just didn't like the result of what we had down there, that tunnel dividing . . . but there was such a rush to get everything into the City. So the next case was the Minnehaha Park case.

MD: Okay, over, yes.

RH: There was a rush to get the highway from the airport to downtown. St. Paul was really . . . but at that time the experience of [I-]35 and the swath of land that it took, and it was . . . everybody could see Cedar Avenue coming in to Lake Nokomis

MD: [Pointing at map] Down in here.

RH: Yes. Well that was scheduled to become a depressed freeway.

MD: Oh, so did you fight that?

RH: Yes, and I think that was stopped because they just . . . but Hiawatha Avenue was going to be a depressed freeway and they were going to go right through the heart of . . .

MD: Right through the middle of this, huh? [Pointing at map]

RH: . . . through there, and they were going to put it in a way . . . Charlie Stenvig, I think, was Mayor at the time. [Bob] Ruhe had come in as Park Superintendent and he just said, "That's going to destroy in part the setting of Minnehaha Park." We got hired and I was handling the case to stop that highway from condemnation.

The Commissioner of Highways had already started condemnation. Downtown council wanted it, the Chamber of Commerce wanted it, and so we came up with this theory that the park system in Minneapolis was a unified park. It had a variety of natural areas. It had active recreation areas. It had all these, and when you take one part of it, you have a loss, so we stopped that.

MD: You prevailed.

RH: [Harold] LeVander was the Governor at the time.

MD: Harold LeVander, okay.

RH: Waldorf was the Commissioner of Highways and we hired Garrett Eckbo as the landscape [architect], well not we, the Park [Board did] to come up with an alternate for [Hiawatha Avenue]. It was going to be a depressed freeway coming into the airport which is down here at Hiawatha [Pointing to map]. Where the creek comes in, there's Longfellow and the lagoon--a lot of those homes flooded during high water conditions. The idea was to come up with a plan that you see there now where we had a tunnel rerouted to the Park,

connected, moved Longfellow and the lagoon. What happened was, we tried it and we lost it in the District Court and we lost it in the State Supreme Court. Our argument was [that] when you have two public purposes--one a park, the other a highway--you don't start out by saying that one public purpose is more valuable than the other. We said that was sort of the same kind of theme we used when we were starting to fight the public drainage systems [that were] draining wetlands we had acquired for wildlife. There should be a higher standard put on you that you just don't start out [saying], "Well I'm bigger than you, so I [can] take it." That was our theory. Well, Judge Vergon in the District Court, he didn't give us the time of day. He didn't write a memo up, he just ruled against us. So, we [took it] to the State Supreme Court [with the] same argument. The Supreme Court said, "Well, the Park Board is just a little minor subdivision of the State Highway Department, [which] is a big state agency; therefore, they've got a right to do that." So they could condemn the land, put in the design the way they wanted, which was going to be at that time, depressed, and so . . .

MD: I can't wait to hear how you won this [Laughing].

RH: . . . then we took the case to the United States Supreme Court with the same argument. At the same time, Bob Ruhe had me going to, they have a National Park . . .

MD: National Park Association, yes.

RH: . . . Association. So I had written some articles on our theory that when you've got two competing public uses, you try to accommodate both of them. Accommodation means a variety of things. In this case, it was to minimize the impact on the park and at the same time accomplish the other. But it meant taking some homes, which nobody likes their homes taken.

MD: Nobody likes to do, yes.

RH: At the same time, when I'd go to these national meetings, I went to a couple of them with Bob Ruhe and I'd present a paper. The people down in [pause], what town is this? I'm trying to think of the town, it's on the river in Memphis, Tennessee--there was a big park,

Overton Park. [Overton Park] was in Memphis, Tennessee, and they were in a way . . . the highway program was the big interstate program. They were going to run a big freeway right through Overton Park. I had given [them] all of our research and our background and our theory. The difference between Minnehaha Park [was that] it was [funded with] fifty percent federal money and fifty percent local.

MD: Okay.

RH: Overton Park was interstate, [funded with] ninety percent federal money. Thurgood Marshall was on the Supreme Court and we had some judges who were willing to take our case, but they have to be so many before they take your [case] -- it's not an appeal, it's a matter of rights. So we were turned down. We had made the argument and supplied it all to Overton Park.

MD: Oh, okay, so Overton Park took it.

RH: Overton Park, yes, out of going to those meetings with Ruhe to the National Park Association. Meanwhile, we had delayed the [development of the] highway down to the airport long enough so the Commissioner of Highways had diverted the money to other projects.

MD: Okay, so you had bought time.

RH: It was a matter of a few years. So then what happened was, they were getting ready to go through on the original project, [and] Overton Park came down from the state. They were about six months behind us petitioning. The [Supreme Court] took their case because of the ninety percent federal [funding].

MD: Ninety percent federal, okay.

RH: But they adopted the argument.

MD: They used your argument, okay.

RH: I remember going to a meeting with Ruhe to the downtown Council and [seeing] a lot of the movers-and-shakers who had formerly been in office, or at least they had an office in

the IDS Building. The downtown Council, the Chamber, and they were all anxious to get this highway from the airport in [Laughing].

MD: Oh, and they wanted to get that in.

RH: They wanted to get it in and I remember going with Ruhe and what I like about the guy, he was just . . .

MD: Fearless? [Laughing].

RH: . . . He just looked them right in the eye and he said, and he took me along and I said, "Well, that case, Overton Park, sustains our argument," and so . . .

MD: So Overton Park, that won in the Supreme Court and set the precedent for the country?

RH: Yes. And so [it] totally delayed that freeway. In the interim, whether it was a Congressman, everybody saw the big swath that 35W had made, and they didn't want to do that on . . .

MD: In the middle of the lakes . . .

RH: . . . and then their later plans called for just making it what you see today.

MD: Yes, the ring around the outside.

RH: But you don't see a depressed freeway. You see what you see on Hiawatha, but what you see at the park was an enhancement in the park. They moved Longfellow Library [and] kept the old railroad station. Ruhe's plan was, and I think they'll eventually do it, was to [have] people come to that park, buy a ticket on a little railroad . . .

MD: Train, yes.

RH: . . . and go all the way up to Lake Nokomis.

MD: All through the chain.

RH: . . . and come back, yes. They're doing some great things down there in the Park now. Down at Minnehaha Park.

MD: In Minnehaha Park. I love Minnehaha Park.

RH: . . . yes, doing some. So, what you have then was all of this occurring over time. The other thing that was occurring was the Park District, because of its accommodation of working with the [unclear], particularly in Carver, we isolated the no more state parks coming in. But then the Metropolitan Council would come in . . .

MD: Right. Regional Council, [David] Durenberger and the Metropolitan Open Space [Commission].

RH: The Met Council really was hoping to take over the parks . . .

MD: The metro operation of the parks. That was the big vision, yes.

RH: That's right. I was active with that too.

MD: But politically you couldn't get these local guys to buy into that.

RH: And successfully we quelled that, but it went on for a couple of sessions for sure, yes.

The Met Council, I think the . . . and St. Paul then got with the program. Minneapolis, Hennepin County, because of its tax base and its leadership, and particularly Bob Ruhe. Between them all, I did work for the state park division, the Minneapolis Park Division . . .

MD: Minneapolis, Three Rivers, Hennepin . . .

RH: . . . but it was all an upgrowth of that first job of mine.

MD: Isn't that rewarding? Then you can sit in this building and know because of your efforts -- and I'm going to ask you about Silverwood in particular.

RH: Silverwood. That was the City Attorney who got [that]. Apparently St. Anthony had annexed, all of St. Anthony was the remnant of Hennepin County that didn't become part of the City of Minneapolis.

MD: Right, right.

RH: That was the effort. Then when the townships around the area like . . . we were a little late but otherwise the school district of Hennepin County, of St. Anthony, at Pentom [development] just across the road from Silver Lake, the City wanted to make an effort to annex that all into the City of St. Anthony . . .

MD: Into the Village of St. Anthony.

RH: . . . and it was a good idea because if we had accomplished it, the school district and the city boundaries . . .

MD: Would be contiguous.

RH: . . . would be contiguous, yes. I think of the savings that you could have one financial person, you didn't need [unclear], you know. But New Brighton was a little quicker and they got 140 [acres] over here [pointing to map]. But we got what is Silver . . .

MD: Silver Lake.

RH: . . . and there was the development of the Apache [Plaza Shopping Center] and then I was the City Attorney. Because of the work in the Park, at one point, I had the state park people and the state game and fish people take an interest in the lake. But the City was so anxious to get going with Apache [Plaza], and actually I think it was a detrimental thing for the lake because of all the surface water run-off, they ran it into the lake.

MD: Yes, all the run-off into Silver Lake.

RH: We had enough of it coming in from New Brighton and they've done some funny things that -- it was just trying to save some money rather than . . .

MD: This is the Rice Creek Watershed, right?

RH: Rice Creek. But it was the City that, on its own, had a project and instead of running the pipe down to where the open ditch is down by the river, the railroad right-of-way, they were going to save some money. The heavy water discharge comes into the lake and then it recedes. They used it like a storage basin. What happens is, because I did a lot in the water pollution area, people don't have any idea of what the first flushes that come off . . .

MD: Right, what's in it.

RH: . . . you know, with all the dogs we have and all those . . .

MD: Yes, all the phosphorus, yes.

RH: . . . you know, and so we wonder how our lakes are even as good as they are. But now we're doing better things. We're building these detention basins . . .

MD: Detention basins, rain gardens, all these things.

RH: . . . rain gardens, yes. I was active in all that.

MD: Isn't that rewarding to see the results? Even looking out here at the rain gardens, oh my gosh.

RH: Yes, and it's rewarding for me to, you know, people say, "What do [you] know about it?" Well, I was up in the parks on the North Shore. I was active as a lawyer in acquiring it and working on it, and then Voyager's National Park.

MD: Yes. What do you remember about Clif French in particular?

RH: Clif was a very organized guy, but he was kind of, I wouldn't say it, not in a bad way, very straight-forward. He had strong beliefs and he imparted them so I was never in any doubt what he wanted to accomplish.

MD: What he wanted [Laughter].

RH: . . . and I was very willing to, because I was very committed in that, I mean I worked on that. Having worked in those different parks, and worked on acquiring those wetlands, you know, you have . . .

MD: So, you had your . . .

RH: . . . you have an investment in it, yes, and the people I met like Dick Dorer and Ed Franey and those fellows.

MD: Who else from the Park District did you work with? You worked with Clif and then you mentioned Larry Haeg and he was Board Chair.

RH: Larry, yes, he was the Board Chair, right. But it was really through the regular managers. Who was the first manager out there?

MD: At Carver?

RH: No, at . . .

MD: Our first Superintendent was Clif.

RH: Clif.

MD: Was the first Superintendent.

MD: Then Robley [Hunt] was the Natural Resources Director and then we had Dave Weaver.

RH: Dave Weaver, yes.

MD: Dave Weaver came later. Larry Gillette was our Wildlife Manager--[he's] still there-- [for] thirty-seven years, he has been with the Parks. Then [Don] Cochran, John Christian, yes.

RH: John Christian. I did a lot with John.

MD: You did a lot with John.

RH: Well, he was kind of the legislative guy.

MD: Yes, legislative administrative guy.

RH: Yes. Very nice guy. Then there's a guy that I see outside of Hackensack. There's one of those nature centers that the Izaak Walton League, when they started, they had . . .

MD: Okay, okay that, um . . .

RH: . . . there's one up on the North Shore.

MD: Okay, and he's up there now?

RH: No. He's out by Hackensack.

MD: He's out by Hackensack.

RH: Above Brainerd. He runs that . . . he used to be with the Park Reserve District.

MD: Oh, testing my memory, and I'm feeling like one of the old-timers here now. I know the guy that died from the Metropolitan Council who was our naturalist for a long time, the big guy [pause] oh my gosh, and he passed away.

RH: [unclear] You know, the Izaak Walton League started some of the learning centers.

MD: Okay, Roger Stein? It wasn't Roger.

RH: No.

MD: He was the naturalist out at [Carver Park Reserve]. Did you work with Kathy Heidel at all?

RH: No.

MD: The naturalist at Carver?

RH: No. But I just got to know those [folks]. . . and then that nice park up on the North Shore, a State Park, Tettegouche.

MD: Tettegouche. I just walked in Tettegouche last weekend, Judge Magney [State Park] and Tettegouche. Yes, I was just up there last weekend. We had a good time.

RH: They had the Voyager's National Park group. Worked with John Blatnik and John Blatnik was . . .

MD: Okay, he was a Senator or Representative?

RH: Congressman.

MD: Congressman, yes, Federal Congressman.

RH: And Ed Muskie.

MD: Yes, I read that, yes, Muskie.

RH: . . . they were the two authors of the first Clean Water Act.

MD: Clean Water Legislation.

RH: Yes. Then I got appointed to the President's Water Pollution [Control Advisory Board].

MD: Yes, I saw that.

RH: And then the Quetico-Superior Commission that coordinated things between Canada and the U.S. That was interesting. That was for three years and then they disbanded it. But those things came through the Izaak Walton League and [pause]

MD: At that time period, was that sort of the growth of the conservation movement? Would you say the time that you were working, it was just beginning and you got the peak of that conservation movement?

RH: Well, we were under the ground floor. The first conference on water and conservation was people there mostly, Ralph Nader was there, [Victor] Yannacone, a lot of educators, you know, college professors. Then you had the activists, Sierra Club and the Wildlife Federation.

MD: Audubon and all those . . .

RH: One reason I joined the Izaak Walton League was . . . I'm not a preservationist in the sense that "we don't touch anything." We all use things, we all need things, and we have to learn how to accept things that you don't like in your backyard.

MD: Right.

RH: We have too many people that call themselves, I think an environmentalist, but it's only because they . . .

MD: They want to protect **their** lake or . . .

RH: . . . yes, not in my backyard. Because every one of us, I mean, we can be computed into people mining, energy, all that. I did a lot of speaking. I brought some stuff you can look through, if you find anything [of interest]. But I think government's job first--food, clothing, shelter, and an opportunity for somebody to have a job. They all use resources. If we want to live the way we want to live, then we have to accept that in some cases we're going to intrude on what . . .

MD: Private rights.

RH: Private rights, yes.

MD: I don't know if you saw the poll last night, I don't know if they are saying WCCO, but they were saying that people are so angry at the government right now, but they're willing to be taxed more if there could be jobs.

RH: And if they could see what the program is. What I think, and what I've always felt, is that public officials should be more clear on what their needs are and why they need it and people will accept it. But right now, as I look at the world and see people, there is a lot of uncertainty. They don't know what, they pass these laws that they don't even know what's in them, they don't know what the, it's uncertain. They don't know, and you can't . . .

MD: And they feel it's all partisan games versus policies for the people.

RH: . . . that's right, and you can't be developing a business and wonder whether . . . and then they've got all these regulations that they think are going to guide everybody's life. I just don't see it. But that's different.

MD: We talked about the Minnesota legislature quite a bit. We talked about some people outside the Park District who were instrumental in working with the parks, Bob Ruhe being one of them. He was really helpful in establishing the Park District as well—and some of the people that worked for Bob Ruhe, they were tremendously influential on getting the Park District going.

RH: Yes, and he was interested in interacting with the Park District. Yes I know, I was around at that time. Al Whitman and those guys, yes, oh yes.

MD: Whitman, yes, yes. When I started as a young girl, I started with Clif and I remember Al and some of those people in the parks.

RH: He was helpful I think in this kind of, “Where is the Metropolitan Council going to go and who’s going to get to do what?”

MD: Who’s going to get to do what and negotiating that through. I remember reading some of that to do a history of the Park District and they said [David] Durenberger is to be sort of a negotiator in this whole thing.

RH: A go-between.

MD: A go-between for all these competing interests. Are there any particular stories when you were working on Park District acquisition? Any landowner story? A story that was really unique or difficult to work through an acquisition? Anybody in particular?

RH: Well we were having a little difficulty with this fellow by the name of Batzli [in] a little community out in the Carver area. I’d have to remember where we condemned it, you know, and he lived . . .

MD: Victoria?

RH: . . . but they liked that, I don’t know why.

MD: Laketown Township? Victoria? Maybe the names have changed since then.

RH: I think the guy was Swiss. There’s a little Swiss or German community out there that’s real pretty. It was only the individual landowners who didn’t want anything to happen.

MD: Because they didn't want it to [happen to] their property, yes.

RH: We worked up in Elm Creek, we had some resistance there . . .

MD: Yes. Anything up in . . .

RH: . . . but I don't think we had much resistance around Independence.

MD: We still have a couple families, the Spurzem family and a guy who's, what's his name, that still holds a grudge. He's the inspector for a couple cities up there and he still holds a grudge. [Looking at map] Elm Creek, Fish Lake.

RH: [Pointing to map] Here's Fish. Elm Creek. We worked on this one. There were some people up there who were a little upset.

MD: Okay. Did you work on Bryant Lake at all? No. Was that right after?

RH: Bryant Lake. No, Bryant Lake, I think we had some people on the one side, but no, that went pretty smooth.

MD: And Hyland was pretty much done?

RH: Hyland. I worked on Hyland.

MD: Hyland, okay.

RH: That went pretty smooth too.

MD: What a great park.

RH: Bloomington had it. Great park.

MD: Great park. Right in the heart of the City of Bloomington. It's a great Park.

RH: Hyland is, yes. This is a nice park [Pointing to map].

MD: Elm Creek right now . . .

RH: What about, who's got the [Coon Rapids] Dam now?

MD: We still have the Dam [Laughing] . . .

RH: Yes, okay, I worked on that.

MD: . . . but we would like the DNR to take the Dam because they want to use it as a fish barrier. In the bonding bill that was just passed, there's \$16 million in it to fix it up for the next fifty years to serve as a barrier . . .

RH: Oh, then that's good, yes.

MD: . . . but we feel that it should be the DNR's then if it's a fish barrier. It's the state's fish barrier, so that's what we're negotiating right now.

RH: Yes, get rid of it. It's a costly . . .

MD: Yes. My thirty years I've worked with it.

RH: Worked on that, yes.

MD: The other thing we've got now is regional trails. I think before you left the only regional trail we had was that between the Dam and Elm Creek.

RH: Oh, the trail system I think is wonderful. You know, the watershed developed the trail systems, and man, just think what you can do. Let's see, you can come down to Minnehaha Park and . . .

MD: We do that Nine Mile, along the Nine Mile Creek coming up . . .

RH: . . . and you come down there, you come down and go right down to Fort Snelling State Park. I worked on all of the Minnesota River Trail stuff. There were some people that didn't like certain things, but basically it's fantastic when you see all the biking and everything that's going on.

MD: Oh, you know, what is . . .

RH: Independence Park.

MD: Independence, yes. We've got trails, yes.

RH: That's a nice park.

MD: Baker is a great park. Lake Rebecca.

RH: Baker is. I worked at this one, they've got that nice golf course there.

MD: Oh, yes.

RH: But those are nice parks.

MD: Beautiful golf course. It's great.

RH: Those were the early ones.

MD: These are classics. Just classic parks.

RH: These, too, when you think about all those.

MD: Yes, and now we have that Lake Minnetonka one.

RH: Yes, I worked on that.

MD: Did you work the Minnetonka then?

RH: Yes.

MD: Did you work with . . .

RH: Well, I worked just on the acquisition.

MD: . . . were you around with Doug Bryant at all or were you were gone before Bryant was Superintendent?

RH: Well, I worked on that one, yes. What about the island out there?

MD: Wawatosa Island? Big Island?

RH: Yes.

MD: Big Island. We just have . . .

RH: Who took it? Who has that? There's a Veteran's [Camp].

MD: The City of Orono has the Veterans' Camp. [The Park District] still has the Arthur Allen Sanctuary which is really sort of undeveloped on Big Island.

RH: Now, the Three Rivers component I never really worked . . . what's going on out there? That's only because, that's the Crow River, right?

MD: Yes, the Crow River would be right here [Pointing to map]. Here's Lake Rebecca. The Crow River, Crow-Hassan Park.

RH: Crow-Hassan -- I never was involved in that.

MD: Okay, okay.

RH: Elm Creek I was.

MD: Yes, okay.

RH: Well, when you think of all the parks that went one way or another I was maybe walking around on them.

MD: Yes you have. I wanted to ask you just a couple of things, just a little more philosophical. Since I have a little bit of time, I wanted to ask you what do you think about the watershed management structure in Minnesota now? You've got Minnehaha, that's a district that has money, and then you've got Pioneer-Sarah Creek Management Organization, they have no money and they say they can't do anything. Then there's all this talk about what should we do with the watershed districts to give them more money and more power. What are your thoughts about that?

RH: Well, I've watched that and I started some of them, as I mentioned. That's how I got connected with Hennepin County. I was hired by them to help establish the Nine Mile Creek and the project on the Minnesota River and the expanded one in Eden Prairie . . . Riley Purgatory.

MD: Riley Purgatory, yes.

RH: We went to [the] Supreme Court on two or three cases to establish that the watershed district's regulations could override local . . .

MD: Government?

RH: . . . government, yes.

MD: But that's the districts

RH: If I were to say anything about the watersheds, I think they spent too much time becoming a bureaucracy as opposed to what the original intent was. I was not a fan of what I'd seen in the later development. It's like anything--the initial people on the watersheds that I knew were just committed to them. There's a difference between preparing an overall plan as opposed to each city having a piecemeal plan for how you're going to manage the water from a natural watershed.

MD: But how come it's stratified that some got to be districts and some are loosely organized, they just wouldn't do it?

RH: Because the State from the get-go, the cities and counties objected . . .

MD: Wouldn't give up the power.

RH: Yes, they thought they were giving up power. The early ones I think we were very successful. One of the cases I handled that went to our Supreme Court was Eden Prairie. They didn't want anybody telling them how they're going to manage their water and we were saying, "Well look, if you're going to save the wetlands . . ." In those days you couldn't build the homes fast enough. Single family homes were the thing . . .

MD: Right. Fill in wetlands, yes, everybody had to have half an acre or a quarter of an acre.

RH: Yes. We developed Mount Normandale Lake and those lakes that we--those were storage areas, artificial lakes. We created them out of old cloth, you know. We raised floodplain elevations to develop at least a hundred-year floodplain and plus with [unclear] and that affected their land.

MD: Yes, they couldn't develop as much.

RH: Our initial fights were to persuade the cities that said, "Look, if we clustered a development, you can give the landowners the economic benefit so that . . ." But there was resistance. People didn't want to have any, you know, those people who knew when to come in. Same way with when Bob Ruhe wanted to get the traffic off of the Park Board right-of-ways, I mean, they were using them like the freeways to come to town. That's when we reversed it and got some of the roadways [to be] one-way, twenty-five mile an hour speed limits . . .

MD: Limits on the parkways, yes.

RH: But we had friction from every one of the lakes. The people were worried about those people coming into our area . . .

MD: Lake Minnetonka, boy, talk about one, whoa.

RH: . . . Right. Lake Minnetonka. They created the Lake Minnetonka Conversation District which was just a total waste. And now what's happening to watersheds, instead of preparing the overall plan, we developed a system, at least in Nine Mile [Creek] where if a landowner comes in and wants to do something and our regulations, we coordinate with the

city planning department. We send them our, so that from the get-go, we identify what it is and then we work it out. Well now, I think they have a tax base and they're trying to make . . .

MD: Be another Minnehaha Creek Watershed District [Laughing].

RH: . . . instead of letting the staffs in the cities take the coordinated plan and implementing it together and have the input come from the watershed board as to the overall management plan or working out the differences. Now they've become a bureaucracy. I would think frankly that they're looking at redoing stuff and maybe there will be some restrictions imposed on those people.

MD: What do you think about the [Pollution Control Agency] (PCA) [who] has required all these TMDLs for the lakes to see what the water quality is? Those watershed districts that have some money are able to do some of those implementing strategies. I've sat in some Pioneer-Sarah Creek [Watershed Management Commission] meetings and they just say, "We don't have the money, we can't do that, we can't protect Lake Independence."

RH: Yes, but the cities have the . . .

MD: The cities have the money but they say they won't--the cities have to bring in the money, but they won't. They won't do it.

RH: They don't have a grant program from the PCA anymore?

MD: Well, no they don't. The Legacy Fund may provide some funding for some projects.

RH: Well, that was our initial lawsuits, Crowell versus City of Edina. Those initial lawsuits, the Crowell cases were a challenge to the city in saying, "You've got to abide by our regulations," and after that it's money. Rosenmeier was the author of the concept, and Sinclair. I was a young lawyer, I drafted the bill. . . they envisioned a little larger districts, but then the County just resisted it. In the cities, the problems were becoming . . . Bassett's Creek was a good example. Minnehaha Creek was a good example. The floodplain of South Minneapolis was changing because development was occurring. I remember the instructions from the county engineer for Hennepin County on Nine Mile, he

said, "Nine Mile Creek is a free flowing stream." He said, "I don't want it. I want to see when this is all developed." He's long gone now--this was just in early stages of development. [He said,] "I want it to still to be a free flowing stream. I don't want it in a pipe like Bassett's Creek going under the road."

MD: Going under the road, yes.

RH: Minnehaha's problem was a little too late because we didn't have the ability because it was already developed. We did save a lot of the upland areas and we did coordinate it, because I represented Minnehaha in the early stages. My philosophy was, you prepare the plan, watershed, you set it out and you lay it out and then you work with the planning departments of the cities and together let the implementation be through the cities, because they've got engineering, they've got building departments, they've got inspection departments . . .

MD: Closer to the people.

RH: Closer, and you don't need [the] full-time staffs that you've got. Now, if you talked to some of the watershed boards, that's, because they know my feelings about it. Although some of them are doing a better job. Riley Purgatory does a better job on this coordination. Bloomington, they've got a good staff. Edina's got a good staff.

MD: A good staff, yes.

RH: So they're in place. They're going to always be in place.

MD: And we monitor, I mean, the Park District, because we've got properties in all of these watersheds.

RH: You don't have to have that, but the only reason they are able to do it is the legislature was a little loose on their funding. The original watershed act put a limitation on the amount of money that the watersheds could have. They weren't visualized as being full-time operating . . .

MD: Entities in themselves. Local government units with a full staff, programs . . .

RH: Local government units. They were developed to be a citizen-led overall look at the total management of the water. Looking back I would say . . . and implemented through the existing . . .

MD: I've heard this from our water resources manager that he feels sometimes that engineering consultants have gotten too close to some of the watersheds, and they are almost self-serving?

RH: Well sure, that was true of the city attorney, the city engineering consultants and all the cities that if you look about . . . I remember what I liked about Bloomington. When you think [of] all these cities in the early stages going, "Why do we have all these individual water systems?" Because it was the way they'd say, "Well you can make money. You go in the water business and put your . . ." [Laughing]. Because we've got this aquifer down there. We've got a great water resource, the river, and we've got good water departments.

MD: Oh yes, if we keep it clean [Laughing].

RH: But what I think about is all the people for years hauling salt in every year to soften their water. Now, who in the world? If you're going to have a water system, then soften the water at the source.

MD: Before it gets there, at the source, yes.

RH: And the money that people are spending and the time . . .

MD: Well, because they're told, we are marketed to think things. It's just like buying bottled water versus drinking it.

RH: I'd say Bloomington is pretty good. You think of all the people in Bloomington who are just getting their water from the city and they end up hauling salt in and now all these other new devices that they're trying to sell. Think of the savings there, see. But you know, the price people pay to have their own little deal and control it.

MD: And control it. So, what are some words of wisdom that you would give to the Park District for the future? I mean, we have twenty-seven thousand plus acres. We are probably this year going to be serving nine million people. These regional trails have

exploded. What are some words of wisdom as you look at environment and recreation?
What would you say to our policy people?

RH: I would say as long as we have this system of local government that we have, is [to try] to continue what you have been doing in developing regional cooperative agreements.

MD: With all these cities.

RH: Yes. When you think about what we could be in our state, you know, this last thing we're going through, the last places that seem to be immune from all the changes in the world. Eighty-five counties with a county treasury and so forth you know, [unclear] conservation people.

MD: So if you can consolidate.

RH: Look at the industry. We've got a great university here, but it's going to come to a head pretty soon. You're reading every day the same thing I'm reading about these pensions of government employees. Fantastic.

MD: One of the things you said about the consolidation, I just received a notice from one of my colleagues in the National Counties Group [that] the City of Topeka and Shawnee County are merging parks and recreation. They're going to have the county [and] city be one parks and recreation. I've seen that in many places around the country where there are starting to be more mergers so you can consolidate and more efficiently look at these services. We are trying again to establish a new relationship with Scott County. We had that one for so many years and then it got on the rocks. So, we're trying to develop something again with Scott County.

RH: We had a good friend down there when we were working on it. That was very difficult. Well, you end up though, you're the dominant feature. The effort by Met Council is just an effort to expand then say that we can do it better. But, I mean, you ended up so now you just have to build them, what I call these cooperative agreements.

MD: Cooperative agreements, yes.

RH: Cooperative agreements should accomplish the same thing. It might be a little bit more bureaucratic but unless something had to be, we're not going to end up with, the counties are going to be there.

MD: Yes, they're not going to give up, but if we can do cooperative agreements.

RH: What I found in working with them . . . I seemed to end up, you know, I worked with Fort Snelling State Park. We ended up getting great cooperation and all, but what it took was to say, "Look, if we're going to dredge the river from Savage down to the Mississippi, then how can we use that project to facilitate the development of Fort Snelling State Park." Just like Minnehaha, if we're going to save the park, then maybe we've got to take somebody's home. The point was, if you get people working that way . . . [unclear] they're too rigid. But I think the watersheds, their day of reckoning will come. Somebody's going to look at them and say, "Hey, there are some excesses here that we need." When you've got municipalities of the caliber that we have . . .

MD: That study that [the] University of Minnesota did, the Swackhamer Study, Deborah Swackhamer, who did the study on the water resources in Minnesota. That's one of the things that she really pointed out and she was supposed to be independent of all political groups. She said that we have to look at the structure of those water organizations.

RH: You've got to, absolutely, no question about it. They are too small in some ways, but they ended up that way because one of the concepts at the time--and I did actually draft some bills that never saw the light of day--was to take the regional watersheds of the state, you know, in Minnesota they would be multi-counties, yes, and there were eight or nine of them that they fought, and because you, water was moving all, and dealing with the Minnesota River where it was a big effort on that because agriculture is so dominant.

MD: Yes, I was going to ask you about what your thoughts are on agriculture and its effect on water resources in a state that's so politically supportive of agriculture, yet agriculture is one of the largest polluters.

RH: Also when you think of all the herbicides and pesticides that have been applied on the water, yes. When I was on the National Water Pollution [Control] Advisory Board--like California and Arizona, you know, the irrigation, growing cotton in Arizona . . .

MD: And you use all that water artificially.

RH: . . .and all the dissolved salts are building up and now they're talking about crops that will grow in salty soil, you know, it's not right. Groundwater contains . . . the major aquifers of our country are . . .

MD: Being threatened right now.

RH: Yes, sure. I learned that. I went up to Alaska. I was on the committee when we built the Alaskan Pipeline.

MD: Oh, really?

RH: Yes, I brought this book just because I didn't know what you wanted to ask me, but it's [looking at book], this was . . .

MD: I'll just have to take a peek at your book there.

RH: It was the education, it's where I came from . . .

MD: I might take a look at that.

RH: . . . but it was my eightieth birthday. It gets into things.

MD: Well, I'm going to turn this off for now and take a look at it. I just wanted to say thank you to Ray for taking the time to share [your] story with the Park District.

**Senator David Durenberger
Former Commissioner
Narrator**

**Judy McDowell
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer**

**October 17, 2008
at the University of St. Thomas
Minneapolis, Minnesota**

JM: The focus of our interview today is Senator Durenberger's role in Three Rivers Park District and also his role in the establishment of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area's Regional Park System. I'm just going to start out by asking you a few questions about yourself. Where did you grow up? Are you from Minnesota?

DD: Yes, I was born and raised up at St. John's University's campus at Collegeville and my father was the Athletic Director up there for forty-two years, from 1930 to 72. I was the oldest of five kids that he and my mother raised. We went to a little two room grade school and the high school, the prep school, and I graduated from St. John's in 1955. I was one of the first Army ROTC classes, so I went into the Army, then came back and went to Law School at the University of Minnesota and then went to practice law with Harold Levander in South St. Paul. All the rest is some history we'll talk about.

JM: I want to find out how you got interested in parks. I know that you had served on the South St. Paul Park and Recreation Commission, and that you were very involved in the establishment of Voyager's National Park. So, tell me about parks, your involvement with parks before you became involved with Hennepin Parks and the Regional Park System.

DD: Well, I think, "Why do you think about parks and why do you think about getting involved in outdoor resources rather than something else?" Probably goes back to where I was raised. I wasn't raised in the cities, I was raised on this campus at St. John's which is now I'm told by Larry Haeg's son Tom, that it's an arboretum. I mean the whole campus is twenty-five hundred acres or something, called an arboretum. I grew up in that and that's

where I played as a kid. My father, as Athletic Director, had run all the inter-scholastic athletic programs, but he also taught a lot about the relationship between, lifetime skills and mental health. That was probably the motivation that got me more involved and while I never became a great skier or a great hunter or a great, you know, bow and arrow shooter, although my first deer I think I ever killed was with a bow and arrow. I don't think I intended it, [laughing] I think it was more of an accident than anything else! But it was that kind of background that always made me interested in the outdoors. I fished incessantly when I was a kid. The only permanent injury I can think that I've ever incurred was when I got hit in the right eye by a sinker while I was trying at age twelve, [laughing] to disengage a hook from a log in the lake right next to our house. So, I just grew up in that environment and got involved in a more proactive way when my law partner Harold Levander was Governor of Minnesota. I was his Executive Secretary, currently called Chief of Staff. That was in a period of time in which the state park system was adding substantial resources and we were right in the middle of that. We were also right in the middle of the debate over Voyageur's National Park. And, my boss was a reluctant endorser of that park and if you're interested then someday I'll tell you the story of how Bill Holz and I got him around to endorsing the park. That was the background when Levander chose not to run for Governor in 1970 or for re-election to Governor in 1970. I was living in South St. Paul. I think Jack Perkovich was the Park and Rec Director in South St. Paul. He married a girl who lived next door to us on Acorn Lane in South St. Paul. That's how I got to know him. He asked me if I would accept an appointment to the South St. Paul Park and Rec Commission, which I did. Subsequent to that, within it seems like a year or so, Al Hofstede, who was the former Mayor of Minneapolis and Chairman of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, asked me if I would accept an appointment by Wendell Anderson, the Chair of the Parks and Open Space Commission. That's how I got involved.

JM: I'm curious, which came first for you? Were you involved with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space first or the Park District?

DD: I think it was all intertwined. I may be recalling the period of time when I was in the Governor's Office, sixty-seven to seventy. I think the first person that ever contacted the Governor Elect on issues that he was going to face was Sam Morgan. My first real introduction to, "Where's the power among citizenry in this state?" really came in 1967 when Sam Morgan called to tell us who he thought should be the Commissioner of Conservation, and why we needed to understand the importance of the State Park System and all kinds of stuff like that. Sam had practiced law at Briggs and Morgan and both Levander and I knew him. Sam Morgan is a legend in his own time, obviously, and in our time. But, I would call that the introduction to the policy side of the evolution of parks and I don't even recall it being called "open space" in those days. But, you know, the state park systems and trails and whatnot else really came at that point. I don't have a distinct recollection being lobbied on, on any issues that related to the . . .

JM: Hennepin County Park Reserve District?

DD: Hennepin County Parks, well, was by then the Hennepin County Park Reserve District, yes . . .

JM: That was the first name and then it was changed to Hennepin Parks and then to Three Rivers Park District. . .

DD: Yes, see 1969 Minnesota Statutes provides the tax levee of eight-tenth of a mil and authorization for bond. I have, I have no recollection whether that was an issue that came to the Governor's attention or anything like that. Probably, probably was not, I think that was strictly played out at a legislative level.

JM: So, you were appointed to the Metropolitan Open Space Advisory Board and who you appointed you to that? That was . . .

DD: Wendell Anderson, the Governor . . .

JM: Wendell Anderson did, alright . . .

DD: He was the Governor that succeeded Levander and by then I was working for Elmer Anderson, the former Governor and doing a variety of things. I was working at HB Fuller

Company as their counsel for legal and community affairs. I was their first in-house legal counsel. But, I also did a lot of their community affairs work. I started their Five Percent Giving Program and a bunch of things like that, but, as part of that, Elmer wanted me to do some work in the community that he used to do and wasn't able to do because he was running the company. Among the things that I was asked to consider doing was this Parks and Open Space Commission, because I had a yen for this sort of thing anyway. In 1970-71, one of the controversial issues was the Minnesota Zoo and we almost lost the Minnesota Zoo. We had people that worked on it for a long, long time building up to it and I remember spending a lot of time in seventy-one legislature after I had left Levander's office, lobbying, and I can't remember all the details of it, but I remember being a key person in persuading some Republicans why they needed to support the establishment of the Minnesota Zoo. And we got the authorization through for it. So, there were these kinds of things. In sixty-nine, I put together the Governor's Conference on the Lighted School. It was about how to do community education and that sort of thing. That's how I got to know a lot of these other Park Directors.

JM: Ok, alright, that makes sense.

DD: Later, we established the Metropolitan Council and so I was involved in the appointment of the fifteen first commissioners or something of the Met Council. I had all that political background, if you will, on the metropolitan area and what are some of the issues, Metropolitan Sewers, Metropolitan Open Space. I mean I knew something about all these sort of things, and, it was fairly easy for them to look at me and say, "You're a knowledgeable person, would you mind doing the parks thing?"

JM: And so what were your thoughts on taking on that responsibility, on chairing that Board?

DD: Well, it was the same thoughts I think that I had when I did the Zoo thing or when two of us lobbied the Legislature to get the old Federal Courts building transferred to the U.S. Postal Service to the Ramsey County so we could save the old Federal Courts building. It

was just one of those things that I did because I understood the politics of it. What did you have to do to get something done? And the challenge here apparently was that there was a history of trying to get to a Metropolitan Parks and Open Space system of some kind, and it had apparently been foiled by a variety of politics, none of which I can remember exactly. But, I think Anderson and Hofstede, who was the Chairman of the Metropolitan Council, were anxious to use whatever political skills I might have to try to figure out a way to get Republicans and Democrats, or whatever they were called in those days, to come together on some new way of thinking about Metropolitan Parks and Open Space. There were at the time politics, there were enough politics in Hennepin County as John Derus and I, when we play golf now, can recall all the time. John was basically the political enemy of the Park Reserve District. We were his enemies, so to speak, because he thought it all ought to be under the County, it shouldn't have the independence that it had. We, of course, laugh about that now because we're older and more mature. But, there was just an awful lot of politics and none of which was helped a lot by the fact that Clif French was probably the best Superintendent in the country. He didn't mind telling people either, whether it was me or John Derus that there was a right way of doing things and there was a wrong way of doing things. And usually, you know, those who ended up doing it the wrong way over time would lose [laugh] because Clif always seemed to win on these issues. But, I was quite aware of the fact that there was lots of small "p" politics, not all partisan, but small "p" politics behind the future of the evolution of the Metropolitan Parks System.

JM: So, you had to get all these people to work together and come up with a Regional Park System. But, it wasn't defined what that would be. I know that there were barriers in terms of cities and counties and different groups of people wanting different things. So, what was your strategy to bring all these people together. How did you do that?

DD: Well, there were a couple levels of politics going on here. If there hadn't been a bunch of Republicans, "young turk" type Republicans. They were all called conservatives in the sixties not Republicans. But, it was Minneapolis, heavily oriented towards Minneapolis, and

this was Bill who became a Congressman and Gary who became the Hennepin County Attorney. A lot of well known names, Arne Carlson, who became Governor. If it hadn't been for those more progressive kind of Republicans, dragging a lot of people into the future of some kind of regional way of looking at difficult development issues, we probably would not have come to the kind of compromise we came to on the Parks and Open Space Commission. We wouldn't even have gotten a Metropolitan Council because we had the challenge there from Gordon Rosenmeier. Rosenmeier was the State Senator from Little Falls and just a really sharp guy and a really terrific legislator who had his own sense of how to deal with accountability, what's at a state level, what is this new thing called at regional level and then, what is local government. And, you couldn't get anything done unless Gordon Rosenmeier would support it. So, there were lots of issues around the creation of the Metropolitan Council where the Citizen's League, Young Turk Republicans, Metropolitan Republicans had to do some compromising between their ideas about a fairly independent Metropolitan Council, independent that is of local politics. And, the responsibility and accountability that Gordon Rosenmeier felt that any kind of a district like this needed to have to both the State Legislature and to local elected officials. And the theory, I think, probably wisely in retrospect, was that if you're dealing with land use issues, whether it's development or taxation or utilities, sewers, water, that sort of thing, or parks and recreation where you can use condemnation to acquire land, you really had to find some way to bring the local government people along, because they had their own tax driven development issues because of the property tax. So, all of this was in the context of a very vibrant, unique, unique among other states in the country, very unique way of looking at regional approaches to issues that would otherwise have been either state or local. And, the whole evolution of the Parks and Open Space Commission has a lot to do with the politics of how the Metropolitan Council ended up. Was it appointed by the Governor? Was it a semi-state agency or whatever the Supreme Court finally said it really was? To whom is it directly accountable? How is the Governor going to select his nominees? There was a lot

of that sort of stuff going on because, in a metropolitan area like this, you had some people who were anxious to have the financial burden of development taken off their shoulders, and others who said, "Hell, I'll compete with anybody, I'll bring in a lot, got a lot of open space out where I am, and I'm going to bring in new business, I'm going to keep my tax rates low and I don't want to be told by somebody whether or not we're going to get sewer or water or things like that." And, then at the national level, there was the Land and Waters Conservation Fund, which was pumping money into states, mainly in the local governments, and local governments were making decisions about parks and open space. One of the things you do in regional development is to try to harness housing funds, you want to try to harness federal housing funds, you want to harness highway funds, you want to harness LAWCON funds in some fashion. There's a lot of issues that relate principally to money and development and land use. They were all tied up in this little period to time here, from 1967 to say seventy-seven. What they needed on the park side was somebody who understood the politics of it, who was a Republican but could think with people about mutual goals and what do we agree on before we get to what we disagree on, let's start with what we agree on. That's sort of always been my style. Then there was a really excellent commission that Wendell appointed. There was a cross section of people, some of whom I've lost touch with, but some of whom are still very good friends. So, it was not a difficult job chairing this Parks and Open Space Commission once the politics of it [determined if] is this going to be something in which local government voices are going to be heard and respected. Obviously part of that was the challenge here [and] that's when I met Clif French. Clif and John Christian and a lot of other people became valuable supporters of the Open Space Commission. Because on the one hand they wanted to see what they were doing in Hennepin County done in all of the counties of the metropolitan area. They wanted to see that. They also recognized the fact that the State wasn't going to get this job done, because the Legislature would get divided over local politics. State Legislators would have to do whatever the local folks wanted them to do. They saw that they needed quasi-

independence in order to get this done in the seven-county metropolitan area. So, the compromise was that every county was going to retain its own jurisdiction, or in the case of the Park Reserve District, as an independent district, was going to retain its operating authority. The first question we had to get over was, you are not going to have a Parks and Open Space Commission that's got operating authority. All of the implementing agencies, whether it's Hennepin or Ramsey or whoever it was, kept their operating authority. We're here to help you do your work, if you're willing to do it and want to do it. The whole idea of the metropolitan approach was to facilitate you doing your work. Because one way or another, we're probably going to have some authority over LAWCON so that will be beneficial to you. If in fact, we can get bonding money from the State Legislature, and the Legislature agrees that in lieu of the states continuing to acquire parks in the metropolitan area that this new Parks and Open Space Commission would be the one that would design the plan under which the Legislature would authorize the money, but the money would then end up going not to the Metropolitan Council or to the Open Space Commission, the money was going to go to the counties or the operating authorities. All of that became part of the, "how do you deal with politics of this?" So then, what the work of the Commission became .

JM: So, you decided pretty early on then that the counties and the cities and the Park District as implementing agencies would have that operating responsibility. That was decided early on. OK.

DD: That was really a very important part of it. Right.

JM: I know that was a key thing.

DD: So, the work of the Commission really became, in order to go to the Legislature and say whatever it was, twenty-four million dollars or something like that, the real important work, in which Clif French and his staff were incredibly helpful, was on defining what is regional, what is regional Open Space. And that's where they introduced us to the distinction between the park reserves and the parks . . .

JM: regional parks . . .

DD: and all that sort of thing. The areas that we, at least on my watch, didn't spend a lot of time defining were trails. Although in the design, as I recall, we had everything linked. It was sort of like taking the Minneapolis Park System and enlarging it into the metropolitan area so you try to link all of this sort of stuff eventually. So, the concept of having the park reserves and the [regional] parks defined appropriately, which we did, and then linking them in some way by trail systems was all built into our park and open spaces plan. Which by the way were done by Jerry Bell who is the current President of the Minnesota Twins, or was the President of the Minnesota Twins. But anyway, it was done, and each time we do this we're linked with the Metropolitan Council so they always know what's going on or why we're doing it. We were responsible for giving this some definition because if you went to the Ramsey County Commissioners or Carver or Scott or Anoka, they're going to have their own definitions of things. If you're going to go the Legislature and say we're substituting for the state's investment, you're going to have to show them, where the context is where we can be confident that this is going to meet the needs of the state, or that part of the state that is the fast growing metropolitan region. They had to know, this is again a Rosenmeier contribution I'm sure. You've got to know what you're getting for your money when you go to bonding. So, our work, our really important work, besides the political stuff, was in the planning and the definitions. And that was not without controversy, obviously. Different people will have different views on things and the counties like Carver and Scott, for example, who were not quite ready for the development at that point, were sitting on the sidelines not thinking that they were directly involved, although they did have people watching and participating in a sense because they had Metropolitan Council members. But, they didn't have the same sense of urgency about this sort of thing that Ramsey or Washington or probably Dakota and Hennepin would have. Anoka at the time was even harder to deal with and that came later I think when I got into being Chairman of the Park Reserve District. But, Anoka was very conservative, as is Dakota, but I never got

the feeling that Anoka, [laugh] even though Elliott Perovich, who even eventually became Chairman of the Open Space Commission, was from Anoka was always like “yeah, yeah, yeah” you were going along to a certain point. So, there were different kinds, even in working with the counties and working with local municipalities, there was always some degree of stepping softly as you go through the evolution of this thing. You’ve got lots of public hearings and you get people involved and you talk to the leadership and that was basically a wonderful learning curve for me because eventually when Clif asked me to consider being appointed by the Minneapolis Park Board to the Park Reserve District, I had a lot of experience [laughing] with the politics of Parks and Open Space.

JM: I sense that there was sort of this urgency in some areas and some areas not so much. And then there was a little bit of inequality in terms of resources to buy land. Minneapolis and St. Paul had pretty established park systems at the time. But, looking out further to counties like Washington, Carver, Dakota; did they have the tax base to buy the land or did they need the help with that?

DD: They really didn’t. They would have bought something smaller and what the people of Minneapolis and St. Paul knew, Bob Parham in Ramsey County and the City of Minneapolis, in particular I think. What they knew is that the populations of these densely already settled two big cities can only benefit from somebody else spending a little money in these wide open spaces. They didn’t have the wide open spaces anymore. They had terrific systems and all that sort of thing, but those systems were under constant pressure as the population grew. They were wise enough and mature enough to know that this is a good thing. Getting into Washington, Dakota, Anoka, Carver and Scott was a really good thing for people that lived in the inter-city. They were always very supportive of this process even though their taxpayers were going to have to pay something to make this sort of thing happen. But, they were always very supportive of it. It was the people in the fringes who had the wide open spaces that wanted to be sure. They couldn’t always see the benefits to

development in the area of large tracts of land coming out of the tax base. That was always, that was a challenge. Some of them saw it, some of them didn't.

JM: Well, I'm probably getting ahead of myself now, but it must be gratifying to look back years later and see how much the parks are used and all the trails that link them all together.

DD: Yes.

JM: So, ok, one of the things I want to ask is, "why did you personally feel like it was important to do this. What were your personal thoughts about it?"

DD: Well, I'm basically a preservationist . . .

JM: it just made sense . . .

DD: Yes. Always have been and my concept of generational equity and everything else is, I'm going to pass on something better to my kids and they're going to pass it on to my grandchildren and things like that. If you don't pass on the natural resources, [laugh], you've lost something. The personal satisfaction has to come in, not in, oh, the beauty of Elm Creek Park Reserve or, you know, one of those sort of things or, gee whiz, wasn't it nice that I was involved in it. It's simply the satisfaction of knowing I live in a community in which people are willing to make these decisions before they're popular decisions or a really needed facility. But, they live in a community in which, at least in those days, people did think about preservation as an important generational value. That I learned from people like Clif and Sam Morgan and [unclear first name] Harmon and, you know, Larry Haeg and Fred King and all these marvelous guys who were, you know, not in politics. I mean they were just in this business.

JM: and very passionate, very passionate . . .

DD: Yes. But I mean they driven by the same thing. It's not trying to take land off the tax rolls but that's what the township Boards worried about, some County Boards worried about that. But, the guys I mentioned and others probably too numerous to mention, you know, they thought of it as a generational thing.

JM: I should mention to you, and I should have brought it along, but I do have a photo of the signing, when Wendell Anderson signed the bill at Hyland Lake Park Reserve.

DD: Hyland Park, right.

JM: I've got a picture of that.

DD: I've got a picture of that in my mind [laughing].

JM: So, the outcome of everything then with the regional park system is that, it was funded by the State but planned by Met Council and then acquired and maintained by the local governments. It seems to have worked out pretty well, I think. Do you have anything to add in terms of that?

DD: No. I think that while it was an evolutionary design, it was dictated. We talk about politics as though it's always adversarial. Politics in Minnesota in the sixties and into the seventies was not necessarily adversarial. There were adversarial issues, the passage of the sales tax or the kinds of things that conservative Democrats who lived in largely in rural areas, they wanted to get more money for highways and I mean, yes, there was controversy, but on issues like reform related issues, the redesign of the role of government, the being able to take on the Met Council as a really important step into enhancing them, the community in a larger sense or the education reform issues. There was a lot of good things going on in Minnesota government that were supported, where the leadership under Levander for example, leadership was coming from a Republican Governor, not a Democrat. A lot of government reform issues didn't make him always popular with real, "let's not spend taxes" kind of a Republican, but, we were living in a different time when people could be creative. The Citizen's League probably made a greater contribution to any of this than any other citizens' kind of organizations. The Citizen's League was basically very creative about the appropriate role of government and how you change it and so forth. So, you can't tell the story of metropolitan parks or any of these sort of things without talking about the role the Citizen's League played and you could see people on the Hennepin County side who were involved in the history-- Ray Black is one that comes to

mind--involved in the history of the Park Reserve District. They were also involved strongly with the Citizen's League and that sort of civic spirit was rampant in our community in that period of time which made all this sort of stuff possible after you dealt with the realities of elected officials at various levels. Clif French was never elected. I was never elected. There are elected officials at various levels of government whose sense of accountability had to be respected to the extent there was modifications in the law or modifications in its implementation. It was done somewhere between, this is the right thing to do and, how do we make sure that the people at the local government level understand what we think we understand about the value to them and their constituencies.

JM: And feel empowered to do what they can do with it as well.

DD: Well, that too. I mean, you've got to give them some sense of, you know, this is, this is why I [laugh] signed on to the deal.

JM: So then, after that, you went on to become, or maybe during that time period, you became a Commissioner for the Park District.

DD: Yes, I can't remember exactly when it was. Probably seventy-four or something like that.

JM: Seventy-three, actually I think I had it down as seventy-three.

DD: Could be, could be, so maybe right before the passage of that.

JM: Here it is, seventy-three and then you served as Board Chair, I think as well for three years or so. So, what do you remember about those years?

DD: You started working with Clif and one of the things I remember is that every time you got close to needing money, you've got to deal with John Derus and the Hennepin County Board. And that was a new element of the politics we had to deal with. But, most of the issues, I think, where there were issues or controversy or things like that were around acquisitions.

JM: And that was regional parks that you were looking at that point.

DD: Yeah, that was.

JM: And not the big park reserves. I think they were all mostly acquired by that time.

DD: Yes, but then, what do you do at the second level, that is what are you going to do in the park reserves? There's lots of debate over the first time we ever allowed the Rangers to wear arms or something like that. There were those kinds of sub-issues. There were issues around land use and what are you going to allow to take place on trails and things like that. But, the first thing that I think I remember, was dealing with these guys from the townships who, for whatever reason, didn't want either the expansion of Elm Creek or one of those park reserves. I don't know what we were acquiring in that period of time. There's Lake Rebecca and Elm Creek and what I remember is these townships that are out in the western part of the county being a problem to us for whatever reason. From a personal standpoint, what I remember most is how much I learned from Clif and from John Christian, Don Cochran and all these guys. I mean, just fantastic! I was so impressed by the talent that Clif brought into the system and so there was always an answer to every question. There was always thorough preparation for the meetings. There was always the willingness to take you on a tour that would explain to you and da-di-da-di-da-di-da [laugh]. So, going from the Metropolitan Council where you were on the third floor, and having meetings in theory about what's going on, to actually going out and being part of the operation of a system was quite a wonderful learning experience.

JM: You must have become quite good friends with Clif.

DD: Best friends, yes. I mean, all the rest of his life. I remember he took me out shortly after I got to be Chairman to Oakland (CA) and introduced me to the guy that ran the East Bay Regional Parks and toured me all around. I thought of that two weeks ago. Because I'm sitting in the office of the CEO of Kaiser Foundation in downtown Oakland on the twenty-second floor of a twenty-two story building and he happens to be George Halvorson from Minnesota. He used to be CEO at Health Partners. But, you look out his window and you've got this whole panorama of the East Bay including the park systems up on top of the Oakland Hills or the Berkley Hills and so it was that sort of thing; Clif knew I was eager to

understand what it was that I was doing, and so he just took advantage of that and I just lapped it all up. I mention John Christian a lot because John was a very young man, but John and his wife walked in every parade I had in Hennepin County while I was running for the Senate in 1978 [laughing], you know, there was John and his wife with the kids strapped on the back walking in my parade and handing out literature. Clif was involved in all these national associations and then, somewhere along the line after I got to the Senate, he made sure I was nominated for and received the National Recreation and Parks Association Citizen Award. Once I went to the Senate it was simply "Dave, don't forget about us and come see us and when you want to play golf [laughing], come play at Baker Park, or if you want to go on a hike or, just stay in touch, you know we're doing great things." They helped, Clif and others, helped when we undertook a national legislation effort that would authorize local counties across the country to use zoning powers to preserve land along rivers. I don't know whether we ever passed that or not, but Clif was very helpful in getting support for that sort of thing. But, yes, we had a very close relationship.

JM: I'm sure there's a lot more stories about Clif. What do you think made him so successful at what he did as a Superintendent of the Park District?

DD: Well, the same thing that makes a very successful preacher a great influence on people's lives, or a very successful teacher, a great influence on the lives of kids when they grow up. It's the very same thing. He was just good at what he did and the proof came every single day. It wasn't a matter of not knowing you were good at what you were doing. He just was ahead of his time. He was good at it. He was given opportunities by people that were, to the world, were more successful than he. Think about Fred [Kind] and Larry [Haeg] and all these rich people that donated land and so forth. The fact that they would trust him and they would actually be eager to do what he suggested that they do was, it was constantly reinforcing. But, the only way I can react to it is by simply saying, what makes a great preacher, what makes a great teacher? They are just motivated by knowing

that the mission they're on isn't about them, it's about somebody else. And they just happened to have the gift of being really good at connecting what people need, with what they know they can do.

JM: So, you left the Park District in 1978, when you were elected to the Senate, is that right?

DD: Well, I'm sure I resigned in seventy-eight. I resigned before I got elected.

JM: I would love to know what you think of the Park District today as well as the regional park system.

DD: Well number one, I cannot honestly tell you that I use it so much that I can. By the time I got back out of the Senate, my kids were grown and married. Right now I've got two families here in the Twin Cities and one down in Chanhassen. I have been to the parks with two grandsons, but they're five and seven and you've got to find time between soccer games and so forth to do it. So, I had this gap where I lived in Washington D.C. for sixteen, seventeen years that made it a little bit difficult to continue to be that involved in parks. I always had Phil Cohen, who worked for me, go to all the Foundation meetings and make sure [that] I stayed in touch. I always wanted to make sure anybody that needed anything, would let me know what it was that they needed. But, when I reflect back on what we were able to accomplish in this period of time -- and I have seen some of this first hand since then because I've stayed in touch with some of these County Commissioners--is what's happened in Scott and Carver Counties. I think nothing would have happened there if it hadn't been for Hennepin, if we hadn't reached out to them. Bill Koniarski, the Chairman of the County Board, was one of the first Democrats for Durenberger and the guys in Carver County were a couple of old German guys. So, I had the Germans and the Poles sitting on our boards all working for me because the couple of years before that we've gotten to know each other and trust each other that Hennepin County was not coming out to run Murphy-Hanrehan. That wasn't our job. Our job was the same job that Clif and his staff did to make the regional thing possible and to have it continued to be operated at the

local level. Our job was to help them think ahead, about how you take this metropolitan regional park system and implement it, where they had their own park directors. But, we thought these so called "joint powers agreements", where we actually committed a fair amount of resources, some of [our contribution] would be money and some of it would be just the talent to help to get them both the design and some of these joint powers parks off the ground. I think we were convinced that it wouldn't happen until it was too late if we didn't do that. But, we had to get over the hurdle of [earning their] trust. When I'm thinking back about some of the achievements here that I was involved in, I love thinking about [how] you can see them in parks. Nobody would go to these parks and know anything about this, if it hadn't been for the Park Reserve District. It's questionable, you know, whether Scott County and Carver County systems would be there in the way they are today. So, that's an important recollection. Now, I have been back to enough parks, both in the east metro and the west metro to know that all the things that these guys talked about, the trumpeter swan, and bringing back the old prairie, [laugh] you know, all the rest of that sort of stuff, is there in spades. It's like mother nature needs just a little bit of encouragement and there it is. In a short period like seventy-four to seventy-eight, you don't see all of that. [You see] the plans for it and the design and the rationale, but you don't actually see it happening. So, in terms of just basic "what do I think about it" I'm just not the kind of guy who says "Oh gee, without me there never would have been a blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And in that sort of thing, it's like a tribute to the foresight of people that lived in a certain period of time. I was just happy to be included in it, just to be part of it, it was to me a really important part of my life. My kids all remember that because they didn't see me for blocks of time when I was doing this sort of thing. But, they knew where my value system was and they know now when they tell me stories about "yeah, dad, I remember this and I remember you talking about and that sort of thing." So I expect that through my children and grandchildren I'm going to see more of the parks.

JM: Well, the Park District now is twenty-six thousand acres with five million visitors a year. I'm not as up on the numbers of the Regional Park System, but it must be very gratifying for you, even if you don't go to them, to know that they're out there. I mean, it's such an important part of the quality of life in the metro area and our health and well-being.

DD: Yes, but my tendency [laugh] because I've been in the policy business for so long is to think about the fact that it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't have been for the Sam Morgans and the Clif Frenchs and all these other people. I was sort of like the small "p" politician in here who, who really loved doing this sort of thing in park reserve, the preservation business as I call it. I could just do some things that Clif couldn't do. I could do some things Sam Morgan [laugh] couldn't do.

JM: You were a key person.

DD: You know, and some of these other people that I came to know in these areas. I was sort of value-added and so, I think about it in terms of them because this was their passion, this was their total full-time job, even for guys like Sam. This is their big deal and my recollection will always be that unless you have people like Clif and the rest of these people and Bob Parham in Ramsey and people like that, nothing happens, nothing happens. We in the policy business come along to facilitate their genius and it's often because geniuses don't always deal well with differences of opinion [laughing]. Sometimes it's a little challenging, but they couldn't do it without us in a sense, but on the other hand, if they weren't there and probably in a lot of areas, they're not there today. This is the regret that I have about what's happened in this community and other communities as well. There is not a lot of room for rewards for pioneers anymore. And those guys and women were really the pioneers and that includes some of the people, you mentioned, Judy Anderson and people like that, that I served with on the Board as well as the Parks and Open Space Board where, as I recall, I don't think of any us got paid. I don't recall anybody being on there because of that or, I guess we got free passes.

JM: Well, is there anything else that you want to add at all?

DD: I can't think of anything.

JM: I just read through John Christian's thesis, that he wrote for his doctorate all about the development of the regional park system.

DD: Oh, did he? Great, well then he's the source!

JM: Well, he's quite complimentary to you in terms of bringing everybody together to make this happen.

DD: Well, I hope this helps and if there's anything you need to fill in, you know how to get a hold me.

JM: Well, I thank you so much for doing this and I really appreciate it.

DD: Well, thank you for doing it, thanks to the District for, thanks for that.

JM: I can tell you there's still a lot of passionate people that are working for the Park District, so that is good.

DD: Is that right? That's really great.

**Tim Marr
Former District Engineer
Narrator**

**Judy McDowell
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer**

**June 3, 2011
Three Rivers Park District
Administrative Center
Plymouth, Minnesota**

JM: Tim, I'm just going to ask you, first of all, to give me some basic information about your background--where you're from, what school you went to, and just some of that information.

TM: Well, I actually grew up in Robbinsdale, [Minnesota] really close to here. I went to school at the University of Minnesota. When I graduated from college, my wife Jan and I were both ski instructors and we were looking to do some serious skiing. There were jobs all over at that time for civil engineers. It was about 1967, and I actually wrote to the Colorado Department of Transportation to see if there were any job openings and there were. We went out and lived in Grand Junction, Colorado and worked on I-70 through the mountains for six years. Then, we started having our kids and it was time to come back because Jan's Mom and Dad and my Mom and Dad both lived here in the Robbinsdale area schools. We wanted them to be around their grandkids, so we were looking for a way to come back to this area. My mother was actually sending me the employment ads from the Sunday paper every week. She'd mail them to me. She wanted us to come back so badly. One day there was an ad for an engineering position at the Hennepin County Park Reserve District, that's what this used to be called, and I applied for that. I flew back here for an interview. I interviewed with Clif French in his office in the Baker Barn. It was a regular interview and I ended up winning the job. We moved back here and I worked for the Park [District] for thirty-one years and counting.

JM: So, what year did you start?

TM: Seventy-three, nineteen seventy-three.

JM: And you were hired as a...

TM: I was hired as District Engineer. There was a Planning and Engineering section that lived upstairs in the Baker Barn. There were three landscape architects, a surveyor, an engineering drafter and there had been another guy that had been District Engineer. He hadn't been here very long and the job didn't suit him. That's the job I took.

JM: Do you have any idea how many employees were working at the time?

TM: Yes, I think there were total, with the maintenance, about fifty employees. About half of them were maintenance employees. Not all the parks were open at that time and there wasn't much development so it didn't take as much to maintain them.

JM: And the Superintendent was?

TM: Clif French.

JM: Clif, Okay. Can you tell me who was heading up your department at that time, who were the staff, and what was your main goal at the time?

TM: Well, the acquisition of the land for the Park District had pretty much been completed and it was just the beginning of the development phase. The Planning and Engineering section was to grow pretty quickly and I think in the next five or ten years after that it grew. John Sunde was the Director of Planning and Engineering and there was a guy named Mike Henry who was Chief Landscape Architect and then I was District Engineer. I had the engineering people and he had the landscape architect people and that's how it was structured there. In the early seventies or maybe mid-seventies, there was some Metropolitan Parks and Open Space money available to develop the trails. That's when we really started opening up these big tracts of land to the public. When I first came to work in 1973, we were beginning work on the Baker beach development, you know, the big development that's there now. That was just being done that summer of '73, but none of the trails were done. In the next few years, we designed and built those trails in about five different parks. I think there might have been a trail at Hyland at that time, but we did

Carver, Rebecca, Baker and Elm Creek. I don't remember what else but those were the main ones.

JM: So, those were all of the in-park trails that we had?

TM: Yes, the bike trails, the paved bike trails, and then, [pause] they really opened up the land and people could start to see and use what Clif and his Board had put together. When really, it was a big deal.

JM: Can you give me an idea of what it was like back then, a typical day or any staff dynamics kinds of things that you remember?

TM: Well, I do remember. I've thought about this and there was an air of respect between different members of the staff. The planning and engineering staff, the natural resources staff and the maintenance staff, we really did work together on developing some of these things. I know that on the Rebecca bike trail, the Rebecca maintenance crew did the grading on that, put in the culverts and shaped the trail, they did that. Back then, one of the landscape architects would be there working with them and showing them where they wanted the trail, and then we'd survey it and inspect the construction. We all worked together and there was a respect between us. It really did have a family feel to it. Not that we got along all of the time, but there was this air of respect, there really was, and hopefully it's still that way. It probably is. I remember that that was the case and I always knew that it wasn't necessarily that way everywhere you worked. I've been at a big highway office and things weren't the same there. It was a neat place because of that. It just had this, you know, warm feeling to it, most of the time.

JM: There were strong personalities still I'm sure.

TM: Yes, there were. The Superintendent was a strong personality. He was an interesting guy.

JM: Yes. You'd already mentioned that the Park District had been in an acquisition phase, which happened a lot before you came, and then we went into development. What I'm wondering is if you can give me an idea of how the Park District decided what to develop.

Was there a master plan process? Were you involved with that? You said there were only fifty people at the time, so were a lot more people involved with that? Tell me about that a little bit.

TM: The landscape architects would prepare [the plan sheets] with the help of the natural resources people. They had pretty good mapping of each one of the park areas. There was aerial photography that had been done and they would do plan sheets. One plan sheet might show the forest cover and the next plan sheet would show the soil types and another plan sheet would show the slopes of the hills and another one might show utilities or existing structures. There were a number of plan sheets in a set. [For example,] if you had Rebecca Park, you had a set of sheets that showed all these different things on top of the same map. The landscape architects, and I'm not sure who else, I suppose the recreation programmers, maybe the Commissioners, had some directive about what they wanted to happen in each of the parks. At Rebecca Park they wanted to have a bike trail, they wanted a picnic area, they wanted to have these different things, a beach, a swimming beach. The landscape architects would then use all these different factors; soil types and slopes and the quality of the water, and all these things to decide where it would be appropriate to develop these things. And that's how that worked; but they worked with the natural resources people and the park recreation people to figure that out.

JM: So, you're identifying where the trails are going to go, the beach thing at Baker, any facility buildings and so forth?

TM: You know, at Baker there had been a resort down there and there was kind of a beach there already. [Both laugh] What the heck, Maple Hill Resort or something. I know there had been a couple of cases where we thought we'd put a beach somewhere and then maybe it was a mushy bottom and it didn't work out and we had to rethink that. At one time, the plan showed a beach to be put in at the pond that was south of the turkey barn maintenance shop at Baker. There was a maintenance shed, it was an old turkey barn, and south of there was a big pond called Lake Katrina. Some of the earlier plans had a beach on

Lake Katrina. Well it turned out that the City of Maple Plain sewage treatment plan had been running its effluent through that for fifty years or something and the bottom wasn't really good, so changes were made. There were modifications made to some of these plans, but anyway, that's how they got to it.

Your outline here was talking about the Board of Commissioners. I can remember that at that time, the Commissioners were generally businessmen from downtown who had this vision of the Park District, these large tracts of land throughout western Hennepin County-- at that time it was just western Hennepin County--and the idea of reserving those tracts of land before the development occurred. They had great foresight. They saw what happened in the City of Minneapolis and was it Theodore Wirth that led the effort to get the Minneapolis park system put together? What a jewel that is for the city. They foresaw that the city was going to continue to develop and so they were a really like-minded bunch of people that made this effort to buy this land. Clif French was their hit man--the Superintendent was their hit man. He would go out and knock on doors and buy people's land. Somehow they got the okay from the legislature to condemn property if people weren't willing sellers.

They did, in many cases, condemn people's family farms to be part of the Park [District] and there were lots of hard feelings about that for many years. We would go to a Council meeting at Dayton, for example, about some trail issue and meet with really, really hostile people up there. They were still mad at Clif for buying their farm. But, it took a Board with that foresight and somebody with Clif's thick skin to have the nerve to go get that done, and he did get it done. By the time I started working here, they had acquired about twenty-seven thousand acres of land. It was just a phenomenal thing to have accomplished. That Board was, like I said, they were like-minded. I bet we went, it was maybe ten, twelve years of meetings where there was unanimous votes on everything.

JM: Oh, really?

TM: Yes, there was never a dissenting vote, except maybe with the exception of the acquisition of the Coon Rapids Dam which was occurring about the time that I came to work. There was maybe a Commissioner or two that had their misgivings about that, but otherwise everything was unanimous votes. These weren't political people, or maybe they were, but maybe they were all one [political] party. Then eventually the Board evolved to be more of a politicized Board, but in the beginning years it wasn't.

JM: Well, it seems like they were very focused, like they knew this was what they wanted to do and they had that in mind.

TM: Yes, they're really to be commended because, I mean, look what you have now, it wouldn't have happened without them.

JM: It's amazing, yes.

TM: And I suppose they got the idea from what Minneapolis had done, but still, they had the foresight to look west and say, "We need to do that out there too."

JM: Well, and there's a film that James Wilke did, "*Reserved for Recreation*" - I don't know if you've seen that or not...

TM: I have not.

JM: I think that's from the 1960s or so, but it's really interesting because it does talk about the development and coming out to the suburbs and how we have to get this land now, so I can see that that was--

TM: He was on the Board of Commissioners.

JM: Yes.

TM: And a guy named John Pike and a guy named Fred King. I think Fred King was the connection to the Coon Rapids Dam. I think Fred King worked for NSP and he had the vision that the Coon Rapids Dam would be an opportunity for people to see the power and feel the power of the Mississippi River, stand right above the river and feel it. I can remember his big bass voice talking about his neat experiences like going down into the Tower Soudan Underground Mine and seeing the mine and the condition it was the day the

miners left. If you've ever done that, that's a phenomenal experience, and that's what he was trying to make at Coon Rapids. He wanted to [p]reserve that Dam and that was his vision for that.

JM: So, that was Fred King?

TM: That was Fred King, yes.

JM: I actually do want to ask you about specific projects that you worked on. I know that Coon Rapids Dam was one that you did work on and I know that the talk about Coon Rapids Dam is always ongoing.

TM: It still is. I saw it in the paper the other day.

JM: Oh, definitely. [I would like to know] why we bought it in the first place and if you have anything to add about that from your perspective. [Both laugh]

TM: I used to spend more than half of my time on the Coon Rapids Dam during certain periods. I saw it through two complete reconstruction projects and now there's another one needed I understand. It is, as Fred King envisioned, a fantastic opportunity to feel the power of the river. I bet if you went out there today as high as the water appeared to be on the drive down, that you can just feel it, you can feel the vibration of it, you can see it. It's almost scary. It's an impressive thing and yet it's proved to be the kind of thing that the Park District has no business owning. I mean, it's just such a huge structure. The river and the climate are picking away at it twenty-four hours a day. There's always going to be scour holes and broken concrete and it just is not the main focus of the Park District. It's been a difficult thing for the Park District to deal with over the years because suddenly you need to come up with five or six million dollars to make this big repair and it puts the budgets for all these other needed projects in jeopardy. The political effort is all put toward Coon Rapids [Dam] and you don't have anything left for some other things you need to do. I mean, you just see it happen. But the Park District does own it, and did own it, and that had to happen. It's a very, very interesting thing for me as an engineer to be around the

Dam itself. Then the construction projects of the Dam have been a real opportunity for me professionally. But, it's not a good fit for the Park District, it never was.

JM: It's a tough one, I know.

TM: It's a tough one. Now, it needs more repairs.

JM: You started talking about Fred King and how he got it. Do you know how the idea first came up for [the Park District] to have this?

TM: That's where it came from and I think Fred convinced most of his fellow Board members, or the majority of them, and he had Clif convinced that that's what should happen. The Park [District] should take this and preserve it. There was some interest expressed--but I'm not sure if it was the City of Anoka or Anoka County, I suppose it was Anoka County--in acquiring the Dam. In the end, the Park District acquired the Dam from NSP and there were hard feelings about that from Anoka County that probably still linger today. Over the years, there were a number of efforts to put hydroelectric power back in there in some form as a renewable energy, cheap renewable energy, and resolve the conflict between the Park District and Anoka County when that was ever talked about. There was an agreement signed between NSP and the Park District that transferred ownership of the Dam and a bit of land on the Anoka County side, the island in the middle and then some land on the Hennepin County side. Then [the Park District] acquired some additional land on the Hennepin County side to make the park whatever it is today. That agreement said that within five years the Park District could do a thorough inspection, structural inspection on the Dam, and that NSP would be on the hook for any necessary repairs to the Dam at that time. That was done just about the time I started here. The company, Barr Engineering, made an inspection of the Dam. They inspected under water and above and they found a number of structural deficiencies in the Dam and NSP was on the hook to pay for those. At the same time, that was the first phase of development of the recreational facilities on the Dam. There was a walkway constructed across the Dam, a pedestrian walkway, which was on the downstream edge, below the operator's bridge that

used to be there. I think the visitor center maintenance shops on both sides of the Dam were constructed about the same time. NSP did not pay for those, but the cost was split out, so the structural repairs were paid for by NSP and the rest of the development was paid for by the Park District. I think the source of funding might have been the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. I don't know if the Park District still receives funding from that, but that was for a long time a large source of funding for development projects. So, that was the first development up there and after NSP paid for that first round of repairs, I believe they were off the hook. They didn't have to pay for anything later on. Of course, the river keeps picking away at it, freezing and thawing and scouring. Every time there has been a repair needed since then, and I know it's been a number of times, the Park District has to come up with the money.

JM: And eventually you ended up going to Japan, is that right?

TM: I went to Japan. The second time we were going to rebuild the Dam, the control gates on the Dam after the first construction project remained as they were. They were the original, built about 1917, steel gates. It used to be that when NSP operated the Dam, they held the pool at its high elevation during the winter. That would give them a bigger drop, a bigger head across the Dam, a bigger difference between the upstream elevation and the downstream elevation. That [created] more force for the water to spin the turbines and generate electricity. They had the pool up and that caused all the ice in the river to back up against the Dam and push against those steel gates and they were in terrible condition. They were all bent up and broken up and then every spring or summer, the worst ones would be repaired. When NSP quit generating power in the mid-'60s and then turned the Dam over to the Park District, the permit to operate the Dam was modified to allow the pool to be drawn down in the winter. So, they'd open up these gates, they opened from the bottom up, and the ice would go through the gates. But the ice didn't get through the gates because they were quite narrow in span. They were about thirty-five feet wide because of the technology when they were built, that's how wide they could be. Because those

openings between gates were so narrow, the ice used to catch in there and back up upstream and cause ice jams way up in Champlin. It was always an issue. So, the second construction project conceived the idea of tearing out all those old gates and putting in some gates with longer spans so that the ice would be free to flow through there, it wouldn't get caught on these intermediate piers, these vertical piers. What happened is that the consulting engineering company that was working on this thing structured the bid package, with the Park District's blessing, to allow bidders to bid on these inflatable rubber dams. And there was one company that was pretty reliable, had a good track record for building those things and another one that was a little newer in the market. The bid package would allow rubber gates or traditional steel gates of a longer span. It turned out that the two lowest bids were both [for] rubber gates. The steel gate bids were millions of dollars higher and we already didn't have enough money for the project. So, the two lowest bids were rubber dams. We'd already said that we would allow the bids on rubber dams so it looked like we had to determine if one of these companies could provide rubber dams that seemed to be reliable. We went to Japan--a representative from the consulting engineering company and I went to Japan--and visited the factories and a number of dam sites where these things were in place. The lowest bidder was the one that had less experience and our mission was to decide whether or not they could perform. They had six hundred of their rubber dams in place in Asia. We saw their factory and in the end, we believed that they could provide a product that would fit, [but] it didn't turn out to be a good decision. Even then we ended up in court because the second bidder sued the Park District. [The Park District] had to pay to defend that lawsuit and it was just a no-win deal. It was pretty ugly. The bid went to the low bidder and they provided the project. They did a great job of installing them. They inflated them and it wasn't two months into this thing and one of them failed. Got a bubble in it. There was a series of really catastrophic failures of that set of rubber dams. There were, I think, six major catastrophic failures. In order to repair those things, you'd have to block off the flow of the river of that whole span. The crew from

Japan would come here and work with a local crew and rent equipment. I think it cost that company millions of dollars in repairs. They had six catastrophic failures before the Board of Commissioners in the Park District just pressured them and they replaced them with a whole new set of rubber dams. They were of a little bit different design on the ends and it solved some of the problems, but that new set wasn't in place a year and one of those failed. Of course we were all just sick about that. When they replaced it, they opened it up and they found that one of the Japanese workers had left his meter stick inside [chuckling] in Japan. They opened it up and they pulled out that stick and we watched, we were there when they pulled that out, and the Japanese workers were hollering, hollering at each other in Japanese--it had the guy's name on it, on the back.

JM: So, they knew exactly who it was? [Laughing]

TM: ...like Jim puts his name on his wrench, you know, yeah [Laughter]. So they knew just who it was.

JM: Well, that's a good story. It's interesting because it seems like the Dam takes a lot of time and money, and trying to balance this against the recreational benefit is tough. I never heard the story about Fred King feeling the power of the river, which is really a wonderful thing when you're on that walkway. But, how do you balance all of that against the time and money?

TM: Well, we thought over the years that with present technology there are ways to do hydroelectric power and still maintain the recreational amenities out there. Some of us always thought we should find a hydroelectric power developer that's interested in doing this and do a deal with them. Let them take ownership of the Dam or responsibility for maintenance of the Dam, but just let us have our walkway over the top. That didn't happen while I was here.

JM: Ok, tell me about a project that you really enjoyed doing.

TM: I worked on so many things with so many great people. Everything that we did here was a team deal, but I got to work on the big ski jump that's out in Bloomington. I got into

that because I did some ski jumping when I was in high school and I had a cousin that was an Olympic ski jumper from Robbinsdale.

JM: Now, that I never knew.

TM: The Minneapolis Ski Club had all the jumps out at Bush Lake, they called them the "Bush Lake jumps" out at Hyland. Since I had done that [ski-jumped], I was the liaison guy with the Minneapolis Ski Club, which is a bunch of real characters. You know, who would jump into the sky? Regular guys don't do that. [Laughing] So anyway, I got to be the liaison with them and ultimately we tore down their big ski jump out there because it was such a structural wreck and eventually built a new one. One day, somebody from, I think it's called the Minnesota's Amateur Sports Commission, called and said, "You've got nine months to spend the money for the new ski jump." It turned out that the Minneapolis Ski Club had somehow gotten money through the legislature to build a new ski jump at Hyland and hadn't informed the Board of Commissioners at the Park District or anybody at the Park District. But one day there was a phone call saying, "You better get going, you've only got so much time to build a ski jump."

JM: How much money was it? Do you remember?

TM: I think it was like six-hundred thousand bucks. It was a lot of money, half a million bucks, something like that. We hired a structural engineering firm from Duluth that had built a similar ski jump in Cloquet that's the same design as that one. They designed this one and we got it built pretty much on time, but [there were] a lot of hard feelings about that. The Minneapolis Ski Club was always different to work with. They just kind of did their own thing. The first year that was in place, at Christmas time, if you drove down the freeway, you'd see those Christmas lights on that ski jump all the way from top to bottom. The Ski Club did that without telling anybody. [Laughing]

JM: That's a good story too. [Laughing] It's so visible too. When you're driving on I-494 you can see the ski jump and every time I drive somebody by there they go, "What is that?" It's kind of fun to point out.

TM: I'm an engineer-type guy and when I came here I had little appreciation for the outdoors and I have to say that--

JM: But you were a skier--

TM: Well, I liked to be outdoors, I liked to be active, but I mean *appreciating* the outdoors. Appreciating the flora and fauna that's around us. I would have to say that working with people like you and all the staff here, that I learned a lot by being here. What I mean to say is that working on civil engineering kinds of things in the context of these big tracts of land was just really, for me, a great job. Building the beaches and the ski trails and the lights on the ski trails was really satisfying for me personally. Not everybody would feel that way. There are some people who would rather be in an office downtown, but I'm an outdoors kind of guy and I became more comfortable, maybe more knowledgeable, certainly more appreciative, of what we had here. Working to be careful on those developments to protect the natural resources was my goal as we went on. Contractors are typically not sensitive to some of the things that we need to be sensitive to. I don't think that will ever change. So you had to be there, not just in the design, but during the construction to make sure things didn't get damaged. When those characters that run that heavy equipment just don't care...I mean when we were in the Begin House, which was the headquarters down the road here, I can remember we were doing a little piece of sidewalk out there in front of the office and the concrete guy went to the edge of the parking lot and washed out his concrete truck right on the edge of the parking lot and then drove away. You can't ever change that, you can't fix that.

JM: That's interesting. So you ended up being sort of an ambassador for the parks in your role and probably passing on that information to them as much as you could.

TM: Well, I think I did, yes. Wherever you went, people just loved the Park District and not just the beaches, but the golf courses and especially the trails because it got them out into the park, whether the bike trails or the ski trails. I mean, the ski facilities here have *always* been the leader of the area, even one of the best--or they were, I assume they still

are--and part of that was due to the maintenance guys. The maintenance guys developed some of the equipment as it was needed, as the trails got wider or we put down more tracts. They developed it, they'd weld it up in that turkey barn shop. They'd figure it out and they'd figure out a different machine to pull it with so it could be good. They had a lot of pride. The guys that groomed the trails had a lot of pride, they really did, and I think that's the thing.

JM: You mentioned the lights, because I know you were involved with the lights. Talk about the lights and how the idea came up for the lights and what it took to get that done.

TM: We did one set of lights around the picnic area at Hyland one year and we hired an electrical engineering firm to do that. They are nothing special. They're just lights on poles that shine straight down and it's just a one kilometer loop around the picnic area. It didn't get that much use. It wasn't long after that--I think French Park was the next one we did--and we hired a different company. It was some guys I'd worked with on another lighting project and they had some ideas. They had the idea of taking a sign light that sits on the ground and shines up at a sign and has a very narrow beam--it doesn't light up everything, it just lights up the sign--and putting that light up on a pole and turning in ninety degrees and shining it forward. It would only light up the trail area, it wouldn't light up way around it, and it would always be shining forward [so] the light would never be shining in your eyes. The ones at Hyland were hanging down like a regular street light and you'd always see that light. These were shining forward and so we tried that. That was a guy named Jim Ehler?, an electrical engineer guy [who] came up with that...Bob Ehler, Bob Ehler. It was a terrific idea and it really worked. In the area, most of the trails were one-way trails and so these lights would always point in the direction of travel. Where there were two-way trails, they used a kind of light that had a little visual cut-off thing so light wouldn't be in your eyes, it would shine down on the trail. They had a lighting pattern that wasn't round, but it was long along the trail. We used it in all the parks, the same system with the same kind of fixtures and it was a great idea. It wasn't my idea and I wish it was, but it was Bob Ehler's.

We got it done and I have to tell you that when we were housed over at the Begin House in French Park that we often got to ski during lunch and if not, we'd go ski after work, when the conditions permitted. One night, it wasn't long after the French trail opened, I think it sat there for a whole year, we finished it up and we had a whole season that was without snow. It sat there without being used. Then the next year, in the middle of winter, after work I was changing clothes and some guy came in there after working out on the ski trail and he said, "I don't know who designed that trail, but that is the best lighting system I have ever seen." I got to hear a guy say that and I didn't say anything, I just thought, "Well, that's nice."

JM: That must have been a highlight of your day!

TM: Well, it's thirty years later and I still remember it.

JM: That's great.

TM: It's fun. It's fun to work on things that people use. Most civil engineers just work on water and sewer all the time and nobody gets to really appreciate it, but here you work on things like picnic areas and beaches.

JM: Right, and you get to hear some of those good comments which is great.

TM: Yes, we all need that.

JM: I talked to Don DeVeau, [the Director of Planning and Development], before I put some of these questions together and he said you were really involved on park rehab. Is there anything you wanted to say about that?

TM: Yes. One of the things that's happened just [about] everywhere, not just with park departments and park systems, but with all municipal things, is that typically there's money available for the development of things, [but] then there [isn't] any money to maintain them. I know that's been the case here, too. The maintenance of all our facilities comes out of the operating budget, so there's always a fight for those dollars and yet there might be a grant to build more bike trails. Well, how are you going to maintain them? We saw that coming. We saw what happened to the City of Minneapolis, their trails, a lot of their

facilities got in just a horrible condition they couldn't keep up with it. They could find money to build new stuff, because that's a political thing, you know, "build a new park, put my name on it." That's just the way of things. I think we started pretty early here planning for the rehab of, first of all, it was the trails and the paving, I was familiar with that from previous jobs, and...[pause]...You know, you think you pave your driveway and it's going to last forever but paving has about a twenty year life if you take care of it, and it just breaks up. You've got to do what you can, fill in cracks, seal it, and keep the water out of it because in this climate the freezing and thawing just destroys everything. We started doing that on our trails and parking lots and roads. We had a regular schedule and by doing that and by planning ahead, by making say a ten year plan, we were in a position to say, "Next year we're going to need this much money in the budget to take care of the things that need to be taken care of in the site facilities." We started doing the same thing with buildings and I wasn't so much involved in that. But the same kinds of things [apply] -- we've got to paint them, we've got to re-roof them, because if you don't plan for that, you're just out of luck and you end up like some of the other cities. Have you ever been in Duluth lately and been on their streets?

JM: No.

TM: They're in a situation where they can't possibly catch up with their road maintenance. They can't. It's just awful. It's hard on your car. But anyway, we saw that coming and I was involved in it. We tried to figure out what to use to sealcoat the trails that would allow them to be smooth. Rollerblading was just starting to occur. Remember we used to go roller-skating and those were regular roller-skates? [Both laugh]. But, that was just starting to occur and we used a bunch of different kinds of sealcoats. There was a guy that was kind of my right-hand guy, Mark Johnston. Mark and I were both rollerbladers at the time. We'd do a seal-coat section and then we'd go skate on it to see if it was good, and some of them were not good. The best sealcoats had some sand on top of it and then you

couldn't skate on it, it was too slow. Because you'd take a stroke and then it would just slow you down.

JM: What a great benefit to your job, huh? [Laughing]. That's great.

TM: I think we did a pretty good job of planning for that [rehab]. It let the Superintendent and the Board plan in advance and do budgeting too, and that has to happen. I assume that's happening today, too.

JM: Yes.

TM: I know that the development of the park continues and you had the Silverwood property about the time I retired [in] 2004. I got to visit that property when it still had all [the buildings]. Was it a camp?

JM: Yes.

TM: It had all kinds of buildings on it. The landscape architects were just starting to work on that and trying to envision what this might become. I haven't seen it since it opened. But, I have to tell you, I ran into somebody in Longville that knew I had worked for the Park District. They lived by the Silverwood area and they just couldn't say enough about it. They just loved it, they said it's a wonderful park.

JM: It's quite beautiful. It's really, really nice.

TM: The point is, the Park District continues to excel in figuring this out, figuring out what people want and need, and that's good.

JM: What about regional trails? Did you get involved with regional trails at all?

TM: Yes.

JM: I think we have close to two hundred miles of regional trails now and the use on them is just exploding, I mean everybody is on the trails. I was wondering if you got involved with any of that.

TM: I did [get involved] up near Elm Creek, but when I left they were fishing around for this one that went out to Hutchinson, went through Wayzata, the Dakota Rail...

JM: The Dakota Rail, yes.

TM: That hadn't happened yet, but it was about to happen. There was one in Elm Creek and one in Hopkins that were just being developed then. But, by that time, I wasn't so much involved in the regional trails.

JM: Any other projects you can think of that you wanted to talk about or that stand out for you in your career?

TM: I don't know. I just think of all these projects in the context of the parks, well I've always thought of it, although I don't think about work very much anymore [Laughing], I'm really glad to be here today and see all you folks. What stands out in my mind is that there have always been so many well-received facilities developed by this organization and the reason for it is the staff. It's the recreation staff, the natural resources staff, the development staff, and the maintenance staff that have pride in taking care of it and that's what made it work. I really do believe that. I like not working better than working here, but I think that having worked here was a real privilege for me, I really do believe that. It was a good fit for me. I was able to tell Clif French that when he retired. I know what an emotional thing that was for him. I went down and visited him in his office and he was sitting there at his desk and it was his last day before he left. His heart was in this place you know, and I sat there and thanked him for hiring me and talked to him about that stuff and it made him cry. But, I believed it and I believe it still.

JM: Well, and I think that's the reason some of us leave and some of us come back.

[Laughing]

TM: That was the thing--that the staff signed on and nobody ever left.

JM: Nobody ever left, I know.

TM: Or if they did, they came back.

JM: I know, I know. You mentioned Clif, but are there any other individuals that stand out for you in your time here?

TM: You know, a couple of guys I'd like to talk about are John Sunde and Mike Henry. When I started, John was the director of Planning and Engineering and he was a really good

landscape architect. I think it was his methodology that made all those plan sheets that I was talking about [earlier] that looked at the slopes and the soils and the ground cover. I think that was the methodology that they used. Mike Henry was his right-hand guy. John died of cancer at a fairly young age and then Mike took over as the director of the department. He was another really good landscape architect and an interesting guy to deal with, a really good landscape architect. Both of them contributed a lot to the design of these facilities, they really did. And there were others, Cotty Lowry and some others I don't remember. It was a bunch of knowledgeable guys that really cared. I would say that the District had a lot of bad luck in people getting sick and dying. Somebody thought it was an unusually high percentage of people who got cancer and died. We lost Bob Rowe who was a terrific, terrific guy--he was a Vietnam war veteran. He died of cancer. Chuck Bellingham was my surveyor and Mark Johnston was my right-hand guy. Don King was Chief Landscape Architect. Dave Werts was a Personnel guy. Who else? There were a whole bunch of them that got sick and died and you wonder if it was the water. Somebody thought that maybe it was the water from the old barn or something. That was never proven. Probably it was just bad luck but we had a lot of good friends here that passed away along early in their careers.

JM: Especially when you said that it was like a family. It was small, and it grew a lot, but still you had a lot of those same relationships.

TM: Yes, I had a lot of good friends here. I haven't been back much to visit and I really enjoyed seeing the people that I've seen already today. I made a lot of good friends.

JM: Is there anything else that you want to say, any words of wisdom?

TM: Well, you know, I never really had much wisdom, but the last Board meeting I went to, I asked for an opportunity to address the Commissioners. They probably thought I was going to say something smart or accuse them of something, but what I wanted to tell them, and I did tell them, was that the Boards up until that time, had pretty much always let staff do their job. That's not the case everywhere and it's almost always been the case here. At

least if they didn't, it went through the Superintendent, and the rest of the staff didn't know they were interfering. But some places, you know, the Boards just outright interfere with people and councils. So, I commended them on that. I think that it's so important for the Boards to let their professional staff do their jobs and they always did when I was here, or nearly always did. I encouraged the Board to continue to be protective of the 80/20 policy, and I don't know if we still have that.

JM: Yes, we do.

TM: I would hope so, because Baker National Golf Course is a big deal. There are a lot of nice golf courses around, but I think that [the golf course] being in the context of Baker Park is what makes it special. Or the beach down at Baker or Rebecca--they're nice beaches, but there are nice beaches everywhere--but put that beach in the context of that beautiful tract of land and that's what makes it special. They've just got to keep protecting what you've got here. See the vision that Clif and his early Board had and continue that vision. I think that's what present Boards and staff need to understand.

JM: Great.

TM: I believe that.

JM: That's great.

TM: It's true.

JM: I know. Thank you!

TM: You're welcome.

JM: That was good.

TM: Good to see you.

**Judith Anderson
Former Commissioner and
Board Chair for the Park District
Narrator**

**Judy McDowell
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer**

**September 30, 2008
at the Administrative Center
Three Rivers Park District
Plymouth, Minnesota**

JM: Our topics of discussion are the history of Three Rivers Park District and Judith's involvement as a Board member and Board Chair. I'm going to start with some background. Are you originally from the Twin Cities, Minnesota?

JA: I came to Minnesota when I was ten. My father was with Northwest Airlines. I consider myself very much a Minnesotan, but not born here.

JM: And, education, college background?

JA: I graduated from Bloomington High School and went to the University of Minnesota. I have a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism. I did some graduate work in Latin American studies in Spanish and had some preparation and training for Peace Corps service at the Montana State College at the time, which is now Montana State University, and Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff.

JM: So when you were in college, you were thinking about getting into Peace Corps?

JA: Yes.

JM: Ok, so tell me about your Peace Corps background.

JA: Well, I met my spouse in college and he had an interest in something like Peace Corps. We decided it would be a good thing to consider doing. You know, being young, naïve, and also feeling very strongly about what was happening globally and in this country. This was in 1966 and early 1967, and so we chose to do it together. We applied, and you do have an opportunity to request a particular area geographically or discipline, but we went into it

completely open. Ken is an engineer by training and so they were really looking at his skills more than mine. I was involved with community development, community organizing.

JM: And you were there for two years?

JA: Two and one half years in Ecuador.

JM: Just out of curiosity, because it seems to fit in so well with your community service and your non-profit background, what did you take out of the Peace Corps experience?

JA: Oh, phenomenal! It's one of things where you go in and people say "oh, what a great thing you've done", and what so many folks don't recognize is what the Peace Corps volunteer gets out of it. I think I'm the person I am to a great extent because of that experience. I also think it strongly influenced the relationship that Ken and I have as a couple and how we chose to parent our kids and be involved in our community. It's unfortunate that more people can't live in another country, not just visit, not just vacation, but actually live with full immersion. If there were catastrophes or disasters or health issues, we were part of the community, to the extent possible as Americans. So we took away that commitment to justice and collaborative thinking, asking, "What is the issue?" "What can we do together to make things better?" But "better" being defined by the people. One of the things that we were very concerned about was that concept of "Ugly American", and of course, Peace Corps grew out of John Kennedy's administration and commitment and it was interesting. I can remember being in places and houses, thatched roof huts, houses, in Ecuador and people would have their shrine and their religious icons and then they would have their photograph of John F. Kennedy, and "Alianza Para el Progreso: The Alliance for Progress." There was strong support in South America for what Americans could offer, but at all times I was conscious of not being the "Ugly American", not coming in and saying "this is democracy, this is how we think the world ought to be, and we are going to tell you our way", but rather "what is it that **you** need that we can identify and build on, based on and respecting the local norms and needs."

JM: So you brought that sensibility back?

JA: Yes. I think I had a little bit of it. Again, somewhat naïve, I was into standing up for justice. There were a number of things I did. I was involved with support for voter registration and in fact, I had intended to go down to Mississippi, made it as far as Detroit and rounded up with a group of protestors and never made it beyond Michigan [Laugh]. So, I always had that sense of justice. If you're not going to be working on behalf of what is just, you're really settling for a level of injustice. And I got that from my dad. My dad was a very ordinary person, he was a union member, but he was very involved in his community, voting and support for people, on a very, very basic citizen perspective. I came from that, but I didn't realize it at the time. It was just who I was. So yes, it influenced all of the things that came to matter for me.

JM: That's great. So you came back to Minnesota. How did you get involved with the parks?

JA: There is a little bit of gap there, a few years. We came back and became part of the community. Neither of us had ever been "avid" outdoor folks or freaks, but we had an opportunity to live near Hyland Park Reserve and we felt strongly about natural resource preservation and opportunities being an integral part of any community, and of course (in) Minnesota, we're spoiled. [laugh] We have these incredible natural resources all over the state and I think, a strong ethic to protect them. You go back to the Theodore Wirth philosophy and some of the things that Minnesota stood out as having a commitment to those kinds of things. We were avid users of local parks, Hyland Park Reserve in particular, and as we became parents and a family, we were involved in community things. Outdoor opportunities were very important to us. For us it wasn't that we had to have park equipment or particular kinds of trails or particular facilities, but rather that the resource existed that we could partake of in ways that felt comfortable for us as a family.

JM: So you always lived close to Hyland?

JA: Since 1970. We've lived there a long time. Hyland Park Reserve is one the smallest park reserves within what was then the Hennepin Parks System, but yet, had some really

unique features. There was a nature center. There were trails. There was a small lake. But, there was also a proposal to put a four-lane highway across the park. We lived west of the park. Most of the development in the city at that point was on the east side of the park, and even not immediately adjacent nor south of the park. Bloomington was still pretty much a lot of open space at that time, and so, when we heard about this proposal to put a four-lane highway across the Park Reserve, we did some listening and gathered information and the sense we had was that, well, this seems to be strongly the position of the developers who would stand to benefit, but will this indeed bi-sect the park? What will this do to this small park reserve in this unique setting, recognizing that there was great potential for development and change west of Hyland Park Reserve. So we got involved with a small group of people, I think it was maybe six folks, and started talking about it and were concerned, and thought, "OK, what can we do from a citizen base to get more information to inform the community and perhaps oppose this roadway?" Without going into the background of why the District was allowing the road to come through, that's all in history. We learned that we had the opportunity for a referendum in our community. That's where we focused, on educating people. We started with those who were already supporters of this park reserve--it was kind of a tiered approach--even those who were not necessarily people who knew a lot about Hyland or used it a lot, but who felt that it was important to the overall sense of the community, not just Bloomington, but that area. So we waged, I guess you'd call it a PR campaign, for information. We were fortunate one of the people who got involved with us was a PR professional, [laugh]--I won't name the company for obvious reasons--so he was very helpful. We also had, I guess it was a matter of luck, a young man running for Mayor of Bloomington at that time, Bob Benedict. I think he was twenty-three at the time he was going to run or chose to run for Mayor. He came from a very strong genuine commitment to the best interests of the community, and was not in anybody's pocket, so to speak. He was running for Mayor and we considered this referendum and we had a very successful campaign and, low and behold, something like

eighty-two percent of the voting population that year said "We don't want the road either." So, that was a success, that was a win, but then as a small group, we sat and said "Ok, now what?" And what we decided was, it's a public system that's publicly funded. There is a Board of Commissioners that's made up of appointed and elected folks. We've been successful on the outside of making a strong case for protecting the resource. Do we now need to look at working from the inside? We kind of sat around and looked at one another and I was a relatively young mom and thought, "oh, what the heck, you know, I could do this," assuming that I wouldn't win the election. But it gave us an opportunity to learn a lot more about the inside, the inner workings, the politics, the process. And at that time, there had been a whole different group of people committed to creating the park system; a lot of heavy hitters, legislative initiatives, from the late forties. I came in as this, really kind of funky naïve mom with two kids sitting under the picnic table. [Laughing] I was being interviewed by media folks and so I did file and waged a campaign and at that time the District was very different politically. I was running for a position on the Board of Commissioners that would represent quite a few communities, pretty diverse, some out in Minnetonka, Bloomington, Richfield, Fort Snelling was one of them, I can't remember, there were like eleven or twelve different municipalities, Chanhassen, part of Chanhassen was part of it, too. The District was represented at that point by someone who'd been appointed to fill a vacancy. He had not been elected to the commission but he was an incumbent, technically, because he was seated. So again I thought, OK, we'll ask some tough questions, we'll focus some attention on the Park District and how it is important to the community and how it's managed and how it's funded and, you know, etc, etc. Never really thinking that I would win and I did. [Laughing]

JM: One of the reasons that I asked you earlier about the citizen support is because it seems like that's what got you in, that when you were in Peace Corps you really realized how important it was to look at the perspective of people. And so, how do you think that perspective influenced your desire to be on the Board?

JA: I think part of it is that if you value something, you have a commitment to protect, preserve, enhance, nurture, whatever it is. Whether it's the schools or your community of faith or your park system, or just your community at large. And so, for me it was just a given, that if I really believed in this, I would figure out a way to be part of it. Whether it was being a volunteer and stuffing envelopes or speaking out. Because I also believed that there are many ways to be an advocate for something, and it isn't necessarily being the most visible, the most vocal, the most whatever. That was just a given. That if I believed in this park system, not just Hyland, and the thing that is so unique, I think, for people in our community is that this isn't just one park. I really got excited as I learned more in that referendum and the process. I got excited about the reality that this is a system of parks, that it's not just one facility, one site, one opportunity. It's a system, whether individuals choose to avail themselves of the entire system or just one part of it. That system, it's that system theory, you know. I think of it as kind of a mobile: you have a mobile and you add another element to it and everything is kind of askew, and yes you can put it back in equilibrium, but it's a system.

JM: I might talk about that a little later, too, because there's a question I have for you about the whole system.

JA: The thing with the park system, too, is that even if you're not an avid user, it enhances our community so that the citizen base, from the perspective of having this opportunity, protecting and preserving it, is just as important as being an active user of it.

JM: So you're on the Board, you win your election [laugh] and you're on the Board and you said that you're one of the youngest on the Board. You mentioned that the Board composition at that time was made up of heavy hitters,

JA: Yes, bankers and real estate agents . . .

JM: And so you're on the Board, you're young and you're also female. Tell me what that was like.

JA: Well, there were some humorous elements of it, too. I remember I came to a meeting or two after the election but before I was sworn in [laugh], I almost said ordained, I can't remember, initiated, whatever, and there was no secret handshake! But I remember coming to a meeting at the old barn and farmhouse at Baker Park Reserve, and Clif French, the Superintendent, looking at me and saying, "Well, aren't you the young lady recently elected to this Board?" And my first reaction was, "don't call me young lady!" But yes, and I thought this was a new experience for me, too. I had not been involved in this type of governmental unit and I was a little out of my league. You know, I walked into that room and I mean, this is crazy, but I remember even during the election going to some fund raiser coffee that a friend was holding for me, and I had to borrow a suit to wear, because that just isn't my world. So yes, those first encounters were very interesting. There was another woman on the Board. She had been appointed by the County Board, Anna Mae Redpath. I don't know how long she had been on the Board when I came on, she was older than me, relatively quiet, and to be very candid, probably there primarily because of political realities and connections on the Board.

JM: How many people were on the Board at that time?

JA: Eleven. It was a very bizarre kind of structure. There were four districts that elected Commissioners and each district had an odd combination of municipalities within its jurisdiction. There were appointments by the County Board of Commissioners, the Minneapolis City Council and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. It was this combination of people, those who were elected, those who had a connection with a municipal park system (Minneapolis) or had some connection to the county. And even at that point, it was the Hennepin County Park Reserve District, but there were already properties outside of Hennepin County and there were already inklings of multi-county jurisdictional joint powers kinds of things. But it was very embryonic at that point.

JM: Just to put this in context, this is in 1975, is that right? And the whole 98th Street extension issue that was in the year before? 1974?

JA: Yes.

JM: Ok. Alright.

JA: The thing with coming on to that Board too is, I had materials and I considered myself capable of reading and questioning and challenging and looking at information presented and recognizing where decisions had to be made. But I had the feeling that prior to then, very few questions were asked at Board meetings. Even at the first meeting, I don't remember the issue, but I asked some question about some of the materials, about the impact of, I don't know what it was, and people looked at me like [gasp], what is she doing?

JM: Tell me about the issues the Board was talking about at that time?

JA: Actually, the first meeting that I attended, the big issue, was Coon Rapids Dam. It was the time when, again if you look at the history, NSP had taken the Dam out of operation, was looking for somebody to buy it or receive it, and had given it to the Park District with a five year time frame in which the District would make a decision whether to actually accept that property and decide what to do with it. That was the first really big decision. Should Hennepin Parks take on Coon Rapids Dam as a potential recreation site, with all of its implications? That was a big decision.

JM: You referenced multi-county jurisdiction, too. I know that Coon Rapids Regional Park included some land in Anoka County.

JA: I think even at that point there was some property owned in Wright County, I'm trying to remember, Beebee Lake, and, taxing my brain here, there were some other properties in Wright County, unless I'm wrong. It happened shortly after I came on the Board, kind of blurs, that if you look at the history of Hennepin Parks, that was really the concept that Theodore Wirth envisioned in 1935. If you look at the report, or the document, I think 1935 was the year. It was called a system of parks for the Metropolitan Twin Cities? I'm sorry, I don't remember the title. You probably have this in somebody's file drawer somewhere.

JM: We've got a copy of it; we've been looking at recently.

JA: And, it was a document in 1935. . .

JM: The eve of Theodore Wirth's retirement.

JA: That report recognized the importance and the value of the City of Minneapolis, protecting its natural resource and making it available through a system of parks. But recognizing that Minneapolis was only one part of this regional opportunity, because the natural resources were there, and of course, at that time there was very little development. It was largely rural outside of the city. There were some suburbs that were evolving. So if you look back, the whole idea of a system of parks, without the absolute constraints of jurisdictions and municipalities and even funding basis, was very innovative. I don't know if Wirth was the keystone or there were some others that were as equally innovative and creative as him, but that really set the tone. I really admired that concept, because I didn't come from the restrictions of just a city, or just a program, or just a facility. I really saw Hyland Park Reserve as a wonderful resource within a system of parks and the system of parks that we knew then as Hennepin Parks really was part of yet a larger system. Not just the state park system. I think we have a lot to thank Theodore Wirth for.

JM: You're talking about the system of parks, and one of the things we've been doing is some planning for the next twenty years. One of the things we've noticed is that our system plans, which were mandated by the enabling legislation,

JA: Chapter 398

JM: Yes.

JA: You don't even hear that term anymore. [laugh]

JM: I know. We had to publish a system plan every five years. And what we found as we looked at all the system plans is that the first five of them maybe, maybe four, took a broad overall view of the system of parks. Then about 1990, they turned into more of a compilation of individual park master plans. I was curious to find out why that happened.

JA: Can I go back before that, just slightly? One of the unique things about this system is the classification of parks within that system. Of course, my primary frame of reference early on was the park reserves. But, what I came to learn, and I will defend to the death

[laugh] if you will, is that the system is made up of different types of resources. The park reserves being the core, and all the philosophies that have gone into protecting and developing and managing those, the eighty-twenty concept, which again I think we've lost sight of. It was the park reserves. But what it did was in the classification within the system, it kind of set the tone for even active recreation areas and trails and historic sites or special use sites, fitting within that unique natural resource opportunity. I don't think that would have happened otherwise. When you think of it, a city park system arises because people need parks nearby, it's that kind of neighborhood. But this system transcended that. This system said, "Ok, we're not going to duplicate or replicate what's there. We're not going to be doing the tennis courts and the community centers and the things that municipal park and recreation, recreation I think is an operative there, too, can and should be doing." So how do we supplement, compliment that? That system and that classification, the system planning I think was unique. I know there were other parts of country perhaps doing it, but I think it was because of the commitment of people like Theodore Wirth and through the 1940's, both legislatively and other community leaders, who felt this is important. It wasn't a competition, it wasn't a power play, it was, "What do we need to protect the resource, to have it compliment what's out there?" I think those early years of system planning, I'm trying to remember if when I came on the Board, what existed as a system plan. We had the classification. I think we had identified the park reserves, but a lot of them were still embryonic, too. They were a couple of hundred acres that somebody had donated and there needed to be a plan for what was going to happen to them. And, as things happened, like when the Noerenberg gardens were given to the District, that was the first special use site, I think we called it that, I don't think it was called a historic site, or trails. When we had opportunities to begin developing trails because of abandoned rail lines, for example. A lot of things happened almost by, I mean there were opportunities, but because the system philosophy and plan framework was in place and respected and supported, all of these other things fit. An example of that would be if

somebody came to us and said, "We've got this tennis court, and we're going to give it to the Park District", and the Park District could then turn around and say, "You know, that just doesn't fit; great tennis court, and we'll help you find somebody else who can protect and preserve it, but it's not our gig." I think that's very very special and that's what I remain obsessed with. I must say it's been a little troubling over the years to see some deviation from that. Now, you mentioned 1990 in particular, [laugh] 1990. . . I don't really remember a lot that happened, but you make a good point that some things started evolving and there were opportunities and the District, in some cases because nothing else existed, got involved. The perspective I take though is, it is better to back off and say, it doesn't fit, or it isn't completely right for us, what can we do as a partner with somebody else to make it happen, but it's not our thing. I do believe that over the years there has been a change from that, and some of that is the dynamics of the community and the times and the economics as well as the leadership.

JM: Now, I'm going to take you back again to the first five years or so that you were on the Board. What did you find challenging at that time, personally, or as a Board? What was challenging? You mentioned Coon Rapids Dam, that that was a big issue, but what other things?

JA: On a personal level, it was learning how these kinds of public agencies operated. I mean, that was again, all new to me. I was used to street corner organizing, [laugh] sort of thing.

JM: Grass roots?

JA: Or, yes, taking on an issue and figuring out a strategy to make it happen and recognizing when you need to back off and when you need to do battle. There were challenging issues. A lot of it was economic, too, and I really didn't have a lot of background in the taxing autonomy and authority and the funding and the funding streams and how parks fit into that. When you talk about pieces of the pie, well we focused on the Park District pie, but the larger community had the community pie. So anyway, it's schools

and streets and mosquito control districts and all these other things. I think that was challenging to recognize where a park system was critical and important to a community and how we partnered with all the other needs and demands. Organizationally, there were issues that maybe it was more personal things. I guess I come at this, and it's an integrity thing, I was not brought up in the buy and sell kind of negotiation. I am a real believer in mediation; you get the facts, you get the information. I believe in a win-win, rather than, "I'm going to win and you're going to lose." Because if somebody wins and somebody's got to lose, there have to be some ways around that. What I learned is, you have good information, you make the best decisions that you possibly can, but you also protect your personal integrity as well as the integrity of the system. In other words, opportunities to maybe move into another arena in the park system or garner some additional funding, what was the ultimate impact of that? Maybe the impact wasn't worth it. Learning what's compromise-able and what's not. I think that's true in everything, whether you're parenting your kids [laugh] or whatever. That was a real learning experience for me and it excites me, but I also believe that in all the years that I was involved with the park system, and what it allowed me to do beyond the parks when I retired from the Board, and other work that I felt strongly about is, that that's what you've got. You've got your belief, your ethics, your values, and some things are just not compromise-able. There might be some times when I really stood firm on issues related to the park system, or to some extent, being part of that Board of Commissioners that others might have said, "what an idiotic thing to do." But that's who I was. The other thing that was very challenging is between my coming on in 1975 and my leaving the Board at the end of 1992, there were a number of structural changes with the Board composition. The legislature at several times dabbled with the government structure of the park system. Minneapolis Park Board and Minneapolis City Council were removed from the equation, I don't remember the exact year [laugh]. You've got to help me with this historically. Late seventies, maybe early eighties and then 1985, I remember there was yet another configuration and we went to an all elected, I think with

two appointments, no, that's what we ended up with. We ended up with five elected Commissioners and two appointed by the County Board of Commissioners, the seven member current structure. But there was a stretch where we had a couple of people from Minneapolis Park Board, but not the City Council. So again, I'm thinking of at least three iterations that I lived through, maybe four, [laugh] I'd have to look back.

JM: And that was all trying to . . .

JA: It was political [laugh] . . .

JM: It was all political, trying to make sure different entities were represented, but also, wasn't there push and pull between whether the Park District should be a separate agency?

JA: Yes.

JM: Or whether we should be a part of the county?

JA: Yes. And that because and it still is the case, the funds to support this park system were public dollars. When I came on the Board, the County Board of Commissioners had absolute control. The Park District Board would recommend a budget, but the County actually approved that. It was county tax dollars, and that was a real concern because County Board members said, "Well, hey, we ought to have more control." So each time there was an effort at a structural change, it had to do with control. Who was on the Board, who was making decisions, and quite frankly, the County Board was a little stressed about, "Hey, if it's our tax dollars, we should have control." They really fought taxing autonomy. That's what the District really wanted. We wanted to be able to say, "We're an independent, public agency with taxing authority and a degree of autonomy to make decisions that are in the best interests of a park system." And that continued to be a battle, although, I think there was a stretch of time where the County Board or individual Board members, in fact, backed off. The State Legislature wasn't really as deeply involved as the County Board. I think the City of Minneapolis was an issue. The years where we had two or three members, who also sat on the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, which was a very political elected body, and it was a little contentious and controversial, and it was

about power. It was real difficult and I don't like that kind of stuff, because my point of view was, again, this is a park system, it's remarkable, how do we make it the best it can be?

JM: Let's work together. Partnerships . . .

JA: Again, long answer . . .

JM: No that's great. I want to spend some time talking about the transition of Park District leadership from Clif, who was the first Superintendent, to Vern Hartenburg who served for just a few years, and then to Doug Bryant. So when you first came on, Clif was Superintendent. Let's talk about Clif for a minute.

JA: I really believe that this park system would not be what it is if it were not for Clif as first Superintendent. He came from a municipal perspective. I didn't know his background. I didn't know him until I got involved with the park system, but he was a real devotee, if you will, of Theodore Wirth and that concept and philosophy of a system, that it's not just this site, this property, this event, but rather what it represents. I think to a great extent, I learned so much from this remarkable man. We butted heads on a few things, but I think to a great extent it was because he felt strongly about his own family and his place in the community and what this park system could be. He was the right leader at the right time, and he took a lot of risks. He also was pretty courageous. There were some things, some funny stories of Clif going to acquire a property and being met at the door by people with shotguns who didn't want to sell to the Park District. But Clif was working on behalf of what he believed in. He had the structure in place. He had the legislation. The other thing that I think was remarkable about this man was that he put in place good people, who were partners with him and partners with advocates outside the District as well, and that's important. I'd liken it to various times in our country's history elections. You know, who you have making critical decisions, and the people they bring in to make partnering decisions, and Clif did an excellent job. That's a tribute to him as well as the people that he did bring in. That was real important. Now there were times when Clif and I might have a

difference of opinion, partly because I would ask questions, and Clif was used to working with folks who said, "Ok, that's great, you know what you're doing, do it." And it wasn't that I disagreed, but I wanted to know. It's kind of like, if you're in charge of something, or you are answerable to a public, which of course an elected official is, although, it's funny, I always thought, you know, I'm on the Park Board, I'm not an elected official, [laughing]but in fact I was. Then you have to defend the decisions and the actions. It wasn't about disagreeing or challenging, but rather, help me be a strong advocate for this, and if there was something we didn't agree on, and many times it was silly things. Some of it was, you know, the kind of fence we put up. Was it to be a budgetary economic fiduciary decision or was it something else, and balancing all that. I learned so much from this man. He really was my mentor in terms of park things. There were also some key park commissioners at that time too. Dave Durenberger was one. The one man I remember in particular is Fred King. Fred and Clif were of like mind in terms of the understanding the system and the commitment and the value to the larger community. Fred was a little intimidating to me besides being [laugh] a big, tall guy. He was very knowledgeable, and he was an important person; I had never hung out with these business folks before! My contacts were [laughing] the street folks. But I remember when Fred was dying and I went to see him in the hospital, and he took my hand, and we talked about the parks, and he very quietly said, "It's your job to protect what we've been working on." It was so powerful and it was so genuine. You know we've talked about Theodore Wirth, but there are [other] people who took risks, who took a strong stand, Larry Haeg was another one. When he was in the legislature in the forties, [he] took strong stands, and you know really wasn't very well supported on some of the things he really wanted to accomplish. If you look it, I think, was it forty-six or forty-seven on the legislature, he first started making overtures and it was 1957 before something happened. So there were remarkable people who had a commitment and had a goal and they were strong advocates and they were wonderful

models for not just parks, but other things in terms of what is important in the community, what's justice and community and people. A little philosophical . . .

JM: That's a great story!

JA: But it's really powerful. I remember one of the other things with Clif was that although he was a remarkable person to create and develop this system, there was a point where we asked, "Was the same person who had that perspective and courage, the right person to move into the next phase, which was more development and management?" I remember talking with Clif about that process, I don't like to do things, this month, this year, but rather look forward. I said, "You know, we really need to be thinking about what happens when you're gone." Of course, Clif saw himself as being in the Superintendent's spot forever, in perpetuity! [laugh] That was real difficult, and at one point when I was Chairing the Board, I said, "You know, Clif, it would be really helpful to begin identifying a time frame and a plan, whether it's four years, five years, whatever, but let's be real clear about how we work towards that progression, building on what you've done. It's not about you leaving and departing and not being the right person to be here, but are you the right person to take next step?" I mean that sounds really kind of harsh and that was very difficult for Clif.

JM: Talk about what was happening at that time, because I know that the Park District had acquired most of the land for the park reserves by this time, and the focus was shifting to regional parks acquisition. Things were changing, and Clif was coming to the end of his time. What was happening with the Park District, what were you looking for in a new Superintendent? And how did that influence your choice for the next Superintendent?

JA: The issue was that much of the property was acquired and we were up against funding the development of those properties and then managing them. What we wanted to deliver to the communities, nature centers, outdoor education, natural resource preservation, as well as, active recreation opportunities through canoeing and hiking and trails and play areas and all that sort of thing. Those are different sets of discipline and skills, and again, Clif was phenomenal at that early stage, and I don't want to say that he was not

phenomenal and wonderful at that development stage as well. But the communities were changing, and the realities were changing. You couldn't do the things you could do ten, twenty years earlier. You couldn't do the back room kind of decisions and negotiations. There was a level of transparency that was changing.

JM: And the actual structure, how the Board worked, was changing again.

JA: Well sure, even the communities where the District had properties were developing. There were more people, there were more homes, there were more issues, and so...

JM: More opinions?

JA: That too. [laughing] More realities, and so that was a change. That was a very challenging time for the Board, staff as well, and I am very respectful of staff over time. OK, if we now have these properties and we have these buildings, and we have these programs, how do we continue to pay for them, how do we deal with infrastructure, how do we market them? All of those sorts of things. What's the right kind of person to lead the charge? One of the difficulties in any organization I think is, you have a leader, you have to have some hierarchical thing. You have the Superintendent, in the case of a park system. But you've also got a governing Board and you've got leaders on the governing Board as well, and then you've got an incomparable staff. How do you balance all of those things? When the Board was seeking a Superintendent to follow Clif, that was the big question . . . What are we looking for? We had great response to the request for applicants and a wide variety of experiences and perspectives and we knew that it would be a departure from Clif. There were people from within the system that had grown up in the system with Clif who were interested in the position, too. So the challenge was, "Do we look inside? Do we look outside? What are the needs? How do we be innovative and creative in this next step?" All the while respecting history and philosophy.

JM: And Clif served for . . .

JA: Was it eighty-four or eighty-six he retired?

JM: Eighty-four. And he came on in . . .

JA: Sixty-two. He became Superintendent in 1962.

JM: So he served twenty-two years . . .

JA: The District was created in 1957, here's the test of my history, 1957 was the enabling legislation, October fifty-seven. And there were consultants retained to develop that initial plan. Charlie Doell is a name that I remember, and some other, just remarkable folks, who I didn't really know at the time, and I think, I'm not sure how involved Clif was in that process, but he was hired in sixty-two, which is really, five years later. I think the plan was in place when he was hired or the structure was there, you'd have to help me with this.

JM: I think the plan actually was in place. I believe the Park District had to have a plan within eighteen months. And Charles Doell did that.

JA: And Clif was hired to figure out how to implement it.

JM: The interesting thing was that Charles Doell was coming from Minneapolis, as Superintendent of Minneapolis.

JA: That's right, with the Wirth perspective.

JM: Yes, he worked for Wirth, although there was another Superintendent in between. There was Theodore Wirth and then Chris Bossen.

JA: Bossen Fields . . .

JM: He served five, six, eight, ten years, something like that, and then Charles Doell became Superintendent.

JA: So Clif was hired and really allowed to run with it, which was great, and again, he ran well [laugh]! I think Clif knew coming from being Park Director in Edina, I think he knew some good folks in the community. He was a good outreach networker sort of a guy. That was important too.

JM: So then Clif was retiring, and you hired Vern [Hartenburg]. Vern was Superintendent for three years.

JA: Vern Hartenburg came in from a municipal recreation perspective and, I don't know how candid you want to be in these sessions. Let me just say that not all decisions about

important things are unanimous decisions on the Board. And there was some risk in bringing in somebody with a municipal recreation perspective, as opposed to a natural resources-based preserve system. But I think there was a sense on the part of many Board members that the Park District needed that. We needed to look at the PR, the activity. We needed to get people excited about coming to the park system and buying in in a different way. There again, it's sort of a new era. There are risks in making changes and bringing in new people and whether you're a corporation or a Park System or you know [laughing] marrying somebody.

JM: Right. Well there is always that tension too, I think, between the municipal systems and the larger park systems.

JA: Well, and the other thing is, the Park Board itself has had some tough times. If you look at just the composition of the eleven member Board or the seven at one point, or, and the current seven member, the configuration, those players and how they interact or don't interact, or partner or don't partner, and support one another in their role as elected officials or as Commissioners. It's going to strongly influence what happens to the District. It's a public agency, it's publicly funded and it has public servants, if you will, so you have that element, and then you've got the staff and whoever the Superintendent is, the people that the Superintendent brings in to actually manage and develop and creatively be there on behalf of the District. So you have all sorts of things working, sometimes at odds, sometimes not. Things might have been different if it was a different configuration of Commissioners, maybe, I mean it's really hard to say. There were times, I know in my involvement, where things were a bit contentious on the Board itself, or contentious between a Board member or members of the Board and the Superintendent.

JM: Now, you served as Board Chair for five years I think, but different, not consecutive years.

JA: At various times, right.

JM: How did that happen?

JA: Well, I never sought to be Chair. I really believed that leadership is a shared thing and the person who has the bigger nameplate or title or speaks up more often isn't necessarily the leader in any group. I always saw my role on the Board as asking some tough questions, being kind of a mediator of sorts, I hate to use the word compromise, but I really like to have people take the responsibility seriously, come to some consensus that's for the good of, the ends, means, kind of thing. What's the end that we want to achieve? There were times when that was really hard to do in a particular configuration of Board members. I don't even remember the first time I was elected Chair, and I hate to say default, but more compromised default than anything else. There was another time that I served as Chair that was really pretty ugly. We went multiple votes and it was very political and very contentious and I didn't take it personally but it was really very, very difficult, because the bottom line for me was, it wasn't about the park system! And what was in the best interest of the park system and the people we serve, and I suppose I'm sounding a little gooey about some of this, but that's who I am and that's what is important to me. So, in terms of serving as Chair, one of the issues of the responsibility of that position is to work with the Superintendent and if you've got a Chair who works well with the Superintendent, then you've got a good partnering and that kind of lays a ground-work if you will, for both the Board as well as staff. It's kind of, you know, the corporate thing. You've got the CEO and then you've got the Chairman of the Board and sometimes that's good and sometimes that can be difficult, too. There was one time I remember when we went into our organizing meeting with things really kind of in flux and there were some members of the Board who really did have a lot of political involvement, political has many interpretations, but had become involved for reasons that were different than others. Or for example, for me, coming up from the grass roots, advocating for a park as opposed to being on the decision-making end. Anyway, I knew it was going to be a somewhat contentious meeting, and difficult, and I hoped that we would come in and look like we knew what we were doing, and not look like, you know, fighting fools in front of staff or others and I was asked by a Board

member to cast some votes in a particular way that I--I'm choosing my words very carefully--that I didn't feel were right. I said earlier in this interview [that] integrity, that's all you've got, and I wouldn't budge. But the outcome of that was, yes, we had a number of ballots. I think we went a couple of meetings where we didn't have a Chair and it felt really kind of crumby, but in the end, when it was resolved, and when we moved on and did what we were supposed to do, the relationship that I was able to have with some of those of players was really very good and very respectful. What it taught me was, nothing's for sale. [laugh] Yes, there's compromise and yes, there's mediation. But once you've taken that stuff across the threshold, you don't come back. So I don't have any regrets about that time, as difficult and contentious as that might have felt at the time. I remember coming home from meetings sometimes thinking, "Why am I doing this? This is just, this is so, hurts my head, you know, this is just not fun anymore!" But, in the end if you can maintain that . . .

JM: Well, it's a big commitment! I remember seeing the size of your Board packets and realizing how much you had to look through.

JA: [laugh] That's why I have to wear glasses now! It was too much reading through the seventies and eighties and early nineties! [laughing]

JM: And I don't think you were compensated at that time, were you?

JA: Oh, let's see. We got thirty-five dollars.

JM: It really was a volunteer effort, wasn't it?

JA: I think we went to thirty-five dollars a meeting, maximum of seventy dollars a month in the later seventies. I don't think those, I honestly can't remember if there was compensation when I came on the Board.

JM: Well, that wasn't your incentive to be on the Board.

JA: No. It was not a biggie. Even at gas prices at twenty cents a mile, it barely covered!
[laughing]

JM: One of the things I wanted to ask you about was outdoor education, because I know that was one of your . . .

JA: Obsessions!

JM: Obsessions, your loves, you really put a lot behind that and I think it was while you were on the Board that the Outdoor Education Action Plan was put together, and I wanted to know if you could provide some history about that.

JA: Well, that fits with what we've been talking about, about a system of parks . . . a city can put in community centers and ball fields and swing sets, and the state can put in large reserves, or state parks for camping and boating. But what Hennepin Parks could do was augment, supplement, compliment in between. If you understand and recognize and respect that concept of a system of parks, outdoor education, environmental education, natural resource protection and education is a big component of that, even if you're talking about active recreation. You know, you're doing something, actively working up a sweat, you're doing blah, blah, blah, blah within Hennepin Parks. If you do that with the understanding, that you are doing this within a natural resource setting, and everything has an environmental educational element to it. It's kind of like with your kids. You go on a road trip and I can remember my kids whining. We'd stop at all the historic markers, and they'd say, "Oh, does everything have to have an educational piece?" [laughing] I would say, "Yeah, it kind of does." My kids now look back on that and they laugh and they say "that was important." So I think the outdoor education plan was a big part of everything else that the District did and had and at that time there was a strong need even in the public schools for outdoor and environmental education. There were requirements within the State Department of Education about numbers of hours and kinds of things that would meet that environmental education framework. I thought the District was a great model for that. We had three nature centers, we had activities and programs going on within the different categories of the system. So yes, I felt very strongly about that, because it's kind of like an organizations' mission statement. Everything you do measured back against that

mission. Well, in a system of parks, multi-types of parks and facilities, if everything you do can be measured back against that environmental ethic, an environmental educational ethic, you've done a good thing. There was great staff at the time, again, people Cliff brought in who believed in that and worked on that, and I feel privileged to have been included as a member of the Board. That was that kind of a thing I felt as the governing body of this public agency. We had a commitment to support that, to encourage that. And certainly, the [Hennepin] County Board of Commissioners wasn't going to do that. And so, that was part of my experience with the Park District that I look back on and really enjoyed, was really enthused about. That was a highlight. That was very catalytic to my sense of excitement. It might seem like rather gooey words, but that was exciting.

JM: I think even as we look at the present day and what's happening, it's so important that whole component about environmental sensitivity and just teaching people about the environment and owning it.

JA: And to be real candid, I think, sadly, and it's only my opinion, but, I think sadly the District has lost some of that, moved away from it through some of its history. There is an opportunity to move back, but I think there's some things that have been done that had I been involved or really thought deeply about it, I might have been really pretty distressed about. Some of it is the modeling. The Park District should have been the model for a lot of the stuff we're seeing now environmentally, global warming, all these kinds of things. I think of some of the buildings that staff recommended and we as a Board approved. They're offensive, and that saddens me a bit. It might have happened no matter what, but I think the District has lost a little bit of its opportunity to be a unique model in some of those arenas. Hopefully, we have remained that in environmental education. But even some of the stuff we do with our nature centers, and our environmental education programs, we're coming back to it. But I do think there was a stretch of time where we departed.

JM: I want to ask a couple of other questions. Your involvement here (at the Park District) is what led you to be involved with the Minnesota Recreation Park Association and the National Recreation and Park Association. Talk about that, because I know that you won awards from both of those organizations and I know you went on to work with NRPA on the Board level, too.

JA: Just as Hennepin, Three Rivers, is a system, I came to learn that we operate within a larger system of people and organizations who were committed to parks, open space, and recreational opportunity. There were some really good people involved at the state level and I enjoyed working with them collectively to protect and preserve what parks and recreation meant to people in Minnesota. At the national level, that was really kind of a fluke. We had a staff person who was involved at the regional level and asked me to come to a meeting, and I said, "Oh sure, why not? Never been to that city, not Rockford, Illinois!" [laughing] And actually, Clif was involved too and the proverbial one thing led to another . . . I realized that there were some really good folks at the national level looking at this. NRPA focuses more on the recreation stuff than the perspective that I had come from here in Minnesota, but, it being able to connect with people who felt strongly about something, that they could advocate on behalf of and take action on whether it was legislative or developing policies or making sure that existing statutes and policies were being enforced, and also creatively looking at new approaches and new ideas. I learned so much from other people and other places. The Special Park District group is a good example of that too. That's at the national level of parks and recreation.

JM: Was that going on before you were involved with the Park District?

JA: No, I was talking with Cris Gears about that - I think the first Special District Forum was seventy-six or seventy-seven, East Bay Regional Park District hosted it and pulled the group together.

JM: So you were around for that then?

JA: Oh yes. In fact, I remember going out to East Bay with (Clif), and actually that was a great opportunity for Clif and I to spend a lot of time talking and picking up pieces from other people and, and ideas that we could apply. And also learning that Clif was a great dancer! [laughing]

JM: Now that I didn't know.

JA: Oh yes! You know, that opportunity to . .

JM: To get to know people . . .

JA: To get to work with people with like-minded commitment and interest, but in a different setting. The other thing is the National Recreation Park Association conferences. I can remember walking through the exhibit areas with some of our staff. We would have had a Board meeting, we're talking about trucks and tractors and all this stuff, and then we're walking through the exhibit area and I can see this stuff and I can talk to other people using the same kinds of equipment, or having the same dilemma's and think, wow, this makes sense. [laugh]

JM: You could learn a lot.

JA: Well, what it is is an opportunity to be a team with our Board and our staff. I remember [that] that was really helpful. I remember one time being in an exhibit area with Don Cochran and we were talking about, I don't what the pieces of equipment and things were, and here is the vendor talking about the product. It was very different than going to a Board meeting and staff presents this thing and here are the bids and you make a decision. So I think being involved outside of the park system is very beneficial for staff and Board members particularly because it gives you a chance as a partner to learn.

JM: There are a number of different ways that it's good.

JA: It's kind of funny, I did serve as a Trustee on the National Recreation Park Association and got involved in some of the stuff there after I left the Park District, so I was sort of a free agent if you will. I didn't have a connection with a local agency, but you know, governance, restructuring and things at that level, and just this last year was asked to be

involved short term with a student teaching planning process that NRPA has undergone, under new leadership and new staffing and it was really exciting, because I still feel so strongly about some of this stuff. New people, but really good people.

JM: And what a journey, too! Think how it started and where you are now. Let's talk about the Foundation, because I know you were involved with the Hennepin Parks Foundation years ago, and now you're with the Three Rivers Park District Foundation. I want to know your thoughts on the Foundation and what that can accomplish?

JA: Well, again that's kind of that partnership stuff. What is it that a public agency can do both financially and organizationally and what is it that it can't? Whether it's garnering advocacy and citizen involvement. An example, the District can hire lobbyists, but there are only certain things at the advocacy level that a public agency can do. And so, what do you need that's the citizen-based? Back to the old community organizing stuff. Both staff and the Board felt that it would be really helpful to have a Foundation to enhance some visibility of the District, revenue generating of course was the high priority, but it was a combination, visibility and a community that we need to be visible in. In want of a better of term, the heavy hitter folks. We had a staff person who was very skilled at developing a Foundation. So that [Hennepin Parks Foundation] was incorporated in 1986. I think it's sad that we got involved in some political stuff, the Lake Minnetonka Regional Park was somewhat controversial and unfortunately a number of our Foundation members had a personal, if not business connection, to the conflict, and that was sad. So there was an element of timing. But I also think that maybe the Foundation at that time didn't have realistic hopes anyway. It was the sense, and this came from staff, that wow, we can generate all these revenues that we can't raise from tax dollars, millions of dollars, capital kinds of projects, and maybe that wasn't very realistic. Maybe it was, I don't know. It's hard to say, was it the dynamics of the situation with Minnetonka? Was it the particular players? What was it? As far as the Foundation currently, well, the Foundation did go into a bit of a hiatus. For a while there we continued our annual registration as a non-profit simply to be able to receive funds if and

when they came. But there were no overtures to seek funds or to create visibility. The impetus [for revitalizing the Foundation] was an REI Grant that could not go to the District but could go to a Foundation. A Foundation Board Meeting was called and there was a commitment on the part of people to make this happen. Karen Bowen [as president of the Foundation] was a really good, fair, balanced, decent leader to bring us back to life, [laugh] to take out the life support tube and let us breathe on our own. We had some good discussions, no heavy hitters, but good people. We brought somebody in to help us look at the viability of a Foundation like this. "What do we want to be when we grow up?" Or, "We're grown up, but what do we want to do?" We're at that point now. In fact, it's very exciting because we are now making a commitment to look at fundraising opportunities for a Foundation, what are the fund raising, revenue generating opportunities and responsibilities of the public agency, the Park District itself and how do we partner? I'm excited by that. I know some studies have been done at various times since 1986, but not much has happened with them. My personal feeling about the Foundation is that it is an incredible opportunity to have a citizen, grass roots, user base to support the park system. I don't see us, at least at this point, doing major capital campaigns. If it happens, cool! But what I see us doing is saying to the people who use and support and love the parks, "What can you do? What's your piece?" And if that means, families putting up twenty five bucks a year to enhance nature center programs, or scholarships for schools, or whatever it happens to be, that we can build on. Then, we have a core of people who understand and support and love this system and want to do something at their level. If the next level is, ok, yes, we can get some heavy hitters and we can get some big revenue, cool, but it has to be in concert with the system itself. What's exciting about the study we're looking at doing now is, quite frankly, the District seems to have dabbled in revenue generating and capital stuff without a good plan. Example would be like the Friends Group and the Seeds Program. Some of it was well intended, but it wasn't clearly thought through as a plan. How did that relate to an outside entity, like a Foundation? What is it that a Foundation can

do better? What is it that the District can and should do, and how do they compliment one another? The study we're going to engage in now will look at that. It might mean that the Foundation is in the neighborhood of a fifty thousand dollar a year kind of entity rather than a half a million or a million. But what we do as a Foundation is very representative of the communities that the park system serves. I'm thinking on a personal level. I know the District keeps changing its education program, but there was a stretch where naturalists would go into the schools or there was the in-service training of teachers because there weren't the funds to bring the kids to the nature centers. At the school that my granddaughter was in, we raised some funds privately from some of the families to pay for a naturalist to come in and do some programs. PTA wasn't even going to do it, because they were raising money for some arts program or something else. What happened, and again, I think it's a pretty good example, some of those kids went home and talked about it and the families would [then] go to Richardson or go the park. You build, you've got to build. So I think the Foundation has a great opportunity at that level at this point in time and in the future maybe something else, but for now, I'm getting a very strong sense from colleagues on that Foundation Board that that's an appropriate thing for us to be doing. Where do we zero in programmatically, what can we do, that we can do well, that helps and supports the District, that the District may or may not be able to do on its own? The consultant we're retaining on this study is helping us make those distinctions. Who does this and who does that, and then how the twain do meet or do not?

JM: Plus you're establishing some connections and growing commitment from people that the Park District may or may not do in a different way.

JA: Yes and I think quite, quite honestly, I don't think the District has done a good job of that "Friends" concept. If you look back on what got me started, we had a Friends of Hyland Lake Park Reserve. We actually had a group. We didn't incorporate, but we had little stickers and that was the group. If you look at park systems in other places, sometimes it's a facility, sometimes it's the park system. In the Twin Cities, different parks

have the "Friends of Lake Harriett", or the "Friends of Ramsey County Park", or whatever it happens to be. I think the District has missed a great opportunity there. Sounds critical, but I do believe they have.

JM: So you left the Board in 1992, however, just as we talked about with the Foundation, you're still involved, and you always have been involved, you've never really left.

JA: I volunteer at one of the facilities.

JM: Yes, you're a very active volunteer! So what I wanted to ask you, and this is our last question, unless there is something else that you want to add. What's your message to the Park District?

JA: To the District?

JM: Yes.

JA: [sigh] Keep on truckin. [laughing] I don't know.

JM: You started talking about it a little already.

JA: Continue to offer a really unique opportunity to the community. You have something that's pretty remarkable. What's the number now, is it close to thirty thousand acres of property and. . .

JM: Five million visitors a year, something like that . . .

JA: Continue to protect that opportunity. To make it available to the community and help people avail themselves of it. And if people don't avail themselves of it, it's still important that they know that it exists. I see it from a family perspective too. When I was on the Board I loved going to the parks just as a user, and every once in a while, an opportunity to be identified as a member of the Board. But just being there, and then when I was off the Board, just showing up, and now as a volunteer. I take the grandkids and my grandkids bike through Hyland all the time and we go to other events and we go to facilities within the system and it's just very joyful to see what was created, what exists for us, and in some respects, our responsibility to appreciate it, to avail ourselves of it and enjoy it.

JM: Well, you've had a huge impact and on behalf of the Park District, we thank you for that and thank you for the interview.

JA: I've enjoyed it. In fact, my oldest granddaughter is doing some volunteering at Richardson for her community service requirement in High School, [laugh] so there you go. We're not going away.

JM: No you're not!

**Douglas Bryant
Former Superintendent
Narrator**

**Margie Walz
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer**

**May 22, 2009
Rosewood Room
Baker National Golf Course
Medina, Minnesota**

MW: I'm here with Douglas Bryant, Former Superintendent. Doug, why don't you tell me about your personal and professional background? Are you originally from the Twin Cities?

DB: No.

MW: Where are you from? Tell us about where you went to college, how you got into parks and recreation, and how you ended up working for the Park District.

DB: I am originally from Indiana; a farm kid. My family moved to the Twin City metropolitan area when I was in eighth grade. I started working for the Brooklyn Center Parks and Recreation Department, primarily on summer playgrounds, with a variety of different capacities. When I was in high school, I worked in the fall, winter, and spring for Brooklyn Center Parks and Recreation. This continued until I was a first-year senior at the University of Minnesota, when I was offered a job in Brooklyn Center as Assistant Superintendent of Parks and Recreation. Don Poss was the City Manager and the stipulation was that I had to finish my degree. A year later I graduated with honors from the University of Minnesota, something I am very proud of. And that's how I got started.

MW: Where else did you work in parks and recreation before you came to the Park District and how did you transition to the Park District?

DB: Well I worked for Brooklyn Center for many years in a part-time capacity and then my first job was Assistant Superintendent for the Brooklyn Center Parks and Recreation Department under Gene Hagle, Director. Then I became the Director in Moundsview for four years for Parks, Recreation and Forestry. I was offered the job in Maple Grove as Parks

and Recreation Director for the Maple Grove Park Board. I worked there as Director for nine plus years. Then I moved to Three Rivers Park District as Division Manager.

MW: So in 1986 you were hired as the Southern Division Manager for the Park District, then known as Hennepin Parks. Why did you apply for that job and why did you want to come to the Park District? What intrigued you about the Park District?

DB: Well, first of all, I was getting bored with municipal parks and recreation. In Maple Grove, we passed a huge bond issue with overwhelming community support. We really built most of the system in Maple Grove, except for the Community Center, which was still in the planning stages. After 17 years in municipal parks and recreation, I just wanted to learn something different. I had been approached about working for the Park District on previous occasions. So I decided that coming over as a Division Manager, working with Bob Wicklund, Bob Gove, Margie Walz and other staff members, that it would be really fun and I'd learn something different. I thought I would be there for a year, two, or three, and then move on to something somewhere else. That's how I started.

MW: You wanted to work here for a year or two or three?

DB: I wanted to learn a large system. I wanted to learn the mission of the Park District and its enabling legislation, which were very intriguing, unique and special, which references why it is a Special Park District. I wanted to learn all of that.

MW: You were on the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at that time. So that's how you got to know about the Park District as much as you did?

DB: Right. When I took the job as a Division Manager, I resigned from the Commission. I was intrigued by this job and given a lot of latitude. The only reason I was hired was because John Christian wanted me to be one of the Division Managers. The Superintendent, Vern Hartenburg, told me I wasn't going to get the job. John hired me anyway and to his credit, and my fortune, it happened.

MW: Tell us about your first job at the Park District? What were some of the responsibilities you had?

DB: Well, we were developing Hyland Lake Park Reserve. One of the biggest headaches that I dealt with was the Creative Play Area at Hyland. We had a slide that people were frequently getting injured on. In communicating with the Superintendent, we couldn't get him to make any revisions and yet the entire staff felt that we needed to cut down the slide or change it. That was a huge issue as well as completing the building and getting the park operational. We also had numerous problems with the Hyland Downhill Ski Area. I terminated the manager and brought in a new manager. We made a lot of changes in the operations and got it on the right track, serving a lot more people at a reasonable cost.

MW: Doug, it seems to me one of the things that you did as Division Manager for Hyland was to keep the prices affordable so we'd have more people there. We got the revenue because of volume.

DB: Yes. When I was at the University, my degree was going to be in Business Administration. I had most of the business academic work already done and I was always influenced by that throughout my career. When I started with the Park District, one of the things at Hyland [Ski and Snowboard Area] was that it wasn't paying its way. The idea at that time was to keep raising prices, which had a negative effect because less people used it. It seemed to be anti-productive or negative in terms of what the Park District wanted to accomplish. So we tried to hold the fees the same, and through marketing and better management, tried to increase use. In a very short time we actually doubled the use, and the rest of the story is history. It's become a very successful facility.

MW: Yes it has. Any particular stories, people or staff; other things you can remember about that time when you were Division Manager?

DB: Well, there are a lot of stories. When I was Division Manager, it was probably one of the most enjoyable parts of my career. It was the people that I worked with. They were highly dedicated; from the naturalist staff, to the maintenance staff, to the management staff. It was just really great fun. We'd sit around on Fridays after the end of the work day and sometimes late into the evening just brainstorming on different things like how to make

things better. We'd laugh, giggle and argue, and it was just great fun. We had a guy by the name of Tom Grimm on our staff and he was a naturalist, but I have to laugh because he was a very interesting person. He really wanted to get into special events. So we moved him from the naturalist position to Special Events Coordinator. We started with a program called Summerfete and it turned out to be an enormously successful program. Tom would go out and raise \$100,000 dollars of private contributions to hold the event. Some of the things that Tom did to make that event successful were just unbelievable.

MW: You had one of the biggest fireworks in the whole metro area I believe.

DB: Yes. Part of the event was that the Minnesota Orchestra would play. We would start at 1:00 p.m. The last year we had it, Red House Records was under contract and they brought in all of their top talent. They would perform all afternoon. We got the big band-shell from the City of Bloomington and the crowd would start building at about 1:00 p.m. Also, throughout the performances of the Red House Records artists, we would have interpretive education programs. Denny Hahn and the staff at Richardson Nature Center were very instrumental in those programs. They were very well received, so it wasn't just the music that was wonderful, it was the program elements that were also introduced. We had sky-divers and the Jessie James gang came running and riding their horses through the park; just all kinds of different things. Then the Minnesota Orchestra would play and by that time we would always argue about the size of the crowd. I would always say 30,000 and Bob Wicklund would always say 20,000. But it was a very large crowd. The Orchestra would play and it was capped off by a performance, but I can't remember the individual's name. It was a very up-beat version of the Star-Spangled Banner on saxophone. I wish I had a recording of it, because it just knocked your socks off. Then we would do the fireworks display. That was about \$20,000 and it was absolutely incredible. The last year, the fireworks contractor had a line of fireworks buried and they all went off at once. Suddenly, 30,000 people stood up and were ready to head for the gate, because they thought the whole hill was going to blow up. When it was over we turned on the lights, and

these people who stood on the hill would exit across the tracks and down Chalet Road. They just raved about the performances of Red House Records, the Orchestra, the saxophonist and the fireworks as the best they'd ever seen. It was enormously successful. In future years, it was a great disappointment when Trammell Crow had financial difficulties and could no longer support it. We also lost Tom Grimm to bigger and better things. We were never able to replace Tom's creativity, nor the financing that was provided by Trammell Crow, but it was a wonderful period of time.

MW: It was a great event.

DB: It was, it was just fun.

MW: So now after all of the fun in the Southern Division, and I know you had some rivalries with some other divisions, we move to 1988. In '88, Vern Hartenburg, the Superintendent at the time, left the Park District. You had the opportunity to apply for that position. Why did you decide to apply for Superintendent?

DB: Well, I got a call in November from a Board member and they asked me if I would ever be interested in being Superintendent. I said I would definitely be interested, but only if the position was vacant. At that time it was not, and I said I thought they should offer the job to John Christian, because I thought John would do a great job. As it turned out, Vern left and I was offered the job. Again I said, "Offer it to John Christian, but if you don't offer it to John and you offer it me, I will take it." I felt that the system had a lot of great employees, but I felt that it needed some improvements in the area of business management. I thought the park rehabilitation program really suffered terribly. Trails that were 20 years old needed to be rehabilitated. We needed to find a financing system to be able to keep up with rehabilitation and maintenance, as well as new capital improvements. I had no idea about the political side of the job and what I was about to embark upon. I was offered the Acting Superintendent job in February of 1988 and at the first meeting I attended, I was asked what my recommendation would be on Lake Minnetonka Regional Park.

"Superintendent, do you recommend that we acquire on a willing seller or on an unwilling

seller basis." I recommended that we move forward on an unwilling seller basis, which means condemnation. My reason was simply that if we were to buy on a willing seller basis, state law would prohibit us from spending the amount of money the property owners wanted, which would have exceeded the appraised value. We couldn't do it that way. Some of the area legislators and our Board members supported acquisition on a willing-seller basis because it was an easy way out of the hot box. They knew that state law prohibited us from doing that, because the asking price was so high, so essentially they were not supporting the acquisition of Lake Minnetonka Regional Park. It read well because most people didn't comprehend the state law.

MW: So it was really the only way you could acquire it legally.

DB: Right. It was the only way to do it; take appraisals and condemn it. Again, that happened at the first meeting I attended. I was Acting Superintendent for six months and then I was offered a City Manager's job at one of the municipalities in the west suburban area. That's when they offered me the Superintendent's job and I signed a two-year contract, but I spent about 19-plus years as Superintendent. I don't think I ever had a Board member vote against my contract renewal, which I am very proud of. Even though, at times, I had some real battles with Board members about what was best for the Park District. But they supported me, we had a great staff, and we got a lot done.

MW: When you took that job, you mentioned two issues; the need for rehabilitation that was in your vision, and that they threw Lake Minnetonka Regional Park at you. What were some of the other issues? What were some of the things that were priorities at that time?

DB: Well, the City of Eden Prairie gave us land for Bryant Lake Regional Park. We had promised to develop Bryant Lake years before I started. The Parks and Recreation Director for the City of Eden Prairie, Bob Lambert, and the City Manager, Carl Julie met with me. They were very upset with the Park District, because we didn't move forward with our obligations. That was their interpretation. In addition, we were able to secure, shortly thereafter, a Metropolitan Council grant, but the grant was less than we needed to get

Phase I development done. The Metropolitan Council policy at that time was not to inflate the grant by the inflation rate, so we gradually fell behind. We were able to raise the amount of money that we needed for Phase I and we also got the Metropolitan Council procedure changed so that grants, if you were unable to implement in the year the money was allocated, would gain inflationary increases.

MW: So that was as a result of your work on the Bryant Lake project?

DB: Mine and staff's. When I speak about my experience, I had a large group of people around me that did a great deal. We all worked together to achieve wonderful things. The Park District, and what was best for it, was always the priority of staff.

MW: Speaking of that, what was your philosophy in building an effective workforce?

DB: My initial philosophy was to promote people from within; Margie Walz was one, Tom McDowell was another, and there were others. If I didn't feel the Park District had internal staff members who were able to do specific jobs, then we would look to the outside. Later, to my regret, the process got somewhat convoluted and we moved away from being able to hand-pick people that were dedicated to parks and recreation, natural resource management, and to the Park District. We started selecting department heads and managers by committee, and I think in a couple of cases we probably missed the target. If I had to do it over again, I would go back to the authority given to the Superintendent to select hand-picked individuals, men and women of all ages, to do jobs that we needed to have done. That's probably one of the mistakes that I made. That's not a discriminatory approach, because the people were selected. When I started as Superintendent, there were no women at the senior management table. Later, at one point, we had more women represented at the senior management table than we had men. So I am proud of that, but I think we got a little bit lost in some of the red tape. As a result, some of the hiring choices pursuant to the selection process that we made late in my career at the Park District were probably not the best.

MW: I've often heard you talk about "you can't do it without a Board." What was your philosophy over the years working with the Board?

DB: Well, I was blessed with some very strong Board chairs and Board members. As a Superintendent, Director of Operations, or Director of Natural Resources and Maintenance, we can't do anything unless we get the policy members to vote in favor of it. One of the biggest things that we accomplished was developing a plan where we would bond every year for capital improvements, including rehabilitation and maintenance on an on-going basis. Over a period of years, we would start to retire those bonds so that we didn't really have a significant impact on tax increases. That has worked out beautifully; at least it had up to the point when I retired. I don't know what the current practice is.

On tough decisions like Lake Minnetonka Regional Park or the Coon Rapids Dam, Dave Dombrowski, Jim Deane and other Board members were very effective working at the legislature. They would walk the halls at the legislature and talk to legislators about things that the Park District needed to get done. Probably the two hottest topics when I started were Lake Minnetonka acquisition and development and the Coon Rapids Dam, which followed shortly thereafter. But the challenge to a Superintendent, the Chief Executive Officer of the Park District, is sticking your neck out and pushing, working with Board members to convince them that even though it's probably going to be controversial, difficult, and that there may be some negative response, we have to try to do the right things for the Park District. We could have walked away from Lake Minnetonka. That was an enormous battle and we took a terrible beating throughout that whole process. But we got it done and it's a marvelous park which will be there for generations to come. I am very proud of this achievement.

MW: Any good stories that you have about any particular instances working with the Board?

DB: I could tell you lots of stories, but I'm not sure that I ought to be telling those stories on a tape. There were a lot of meetings and one-on-one direction. One of the Board

members, Mona Moede, was an unbelievable supporter of the Park District. Whenever she thought there was something wrong or inconsistent, she was a warrior for the Park District. She was very hard on staff at times, because she thought that there might be some problem. Our auditor back in the early days, it must have been back in the late 1980s, early '90s, had mentioned to Mona that he thought our revenues could be higher at the down-hill ski area and our expenditures less. Mona came into my office one day and grilled me for two and a half hours about the Hyland Ski Area budget, which by the way I knew very well from being a division manager. She made a mistake and mentioned the auditor. I then knew what was behind this discussion and I said, "Mona, call the auditor, get him on the phone. Tell him to get his rear-end over here to this meeting and in front of me and you, explain how he is going to increase revenues and cut expenditures." The meeting was over. Mona, as Budget and Finance Committee Chair, supported the recommendations for Hyland Lake Park Reserve. That was the beginning of a challenging, but yet wonderful relationship with one of the Board members. There has to be a great deal of trust and it has to be objective. The Board has to let staff do their job. For the most part, the Board that I worked for all those years, let me, on behalf of the staff, propose what needed to be and they would take care of public policy. Once the Board passed policies, our staff did not second guess or criticize those policies; we just moved forward.

There were lots of stories about the Coon Rapids Dam, about Eden Prairie and Bryant Lake Regional Park, about capital improvements, and on and on and on. But in the end, when I was working for the Park District as Superintendent, the policy-makers did their job and staff did theirs. One of the criticisms I have of government today is when it doesn't work, it's because the staff oversteps its bounds or policy-makers don't do their job and try to do the staffs' job. It works the very best when you have policy-makers that set policy and allow staff to do their job. When I worked for Dave Dombrowski and Jim Deane as the chairs of the Board for all those years, they allowed that to happen. To their credit and

other Board members, who were all very active and strong, we always did what we believed was best for the Park District and the public as a unit. That's something I am very proud of.

MW: You definitely should be, and that moves us right into projects and accomplishments.

In looking at the history of the Park District, we call "the Doug Bryant Era," "the Era of Development", although you did have acquisition as you just mentioned. Can you talk about some of the significant acquisitions that you had and then we'll move into some of the park development projects? You talked a little bit about Lake Minnetonka. Anything else you want to share with us about that acquisition?

DB: Well, I had a stroke in 1995, a severe stroke. I'm sure it was a direct result of the battles over Lake Minnetonka. One of the attorneys representing a citizens group during that process had a heart attack and died. We had Vern Gagne and his wife Mary involved. Mary would stand up at public meetings and accuse me of stealing her home. The fact of the matter was that Vern privately was trying to sell his house for as much money as he could get for his property. It was a really tough process throughout the whole condemnation procedure. It passed out of the Senate by one vote to allow us to condemn it without municipal approval and that was a huge issue in the State of Minnesota.

MW: You had to get special legislation for Lake Minnetonka, correct?

DB: Yes. It's never fun to go to the legislature and ask for special consideration. Our lobbyist did a marvelous job and our Board and staff were over there all the time. We just kept working and working and working. The bottom line was that the Park District was asked by Governor Quie, I believe, to get involved in the acquisition and development of a regional park on Lake Minnetonka.

MW: Why was that so important? Describe why it was so important to have that property.

DB: Well, I believe it had been attempted two other times and failed. In the metropolitan area, the Regional Park System has a presence on every major water body. Regional parks are about natural resources, recreation and outdoor education, but almost all of them are located on a significant water body. It's interesting that the only major water body in the

metropolitan area that didn't have a regional park was Lake Minnetonka. I'm sure that was held off for years because of political power and wealth. We took that on and were able to get it done. That park is a marvelous park and will be heavily utilized for years to come. Many of us paid a dear price for that; Board members, staff members, attorneys, but it's something that we're really proud of. Also at that time, some of our Commissioners didn't draw the lines on the boundary of the Park. So, they were considering 292 acres, or 350 acres, and it generated a lot of controversy and opposition by the local residents. Right after I started, I recommended that we draw the boundary once and for all. When we drew the final boundary, it included three property owners, but only one residence; Vern Gagne's residence. The rest of it was all land that was proposed to be developed for residential units. Ed Pauls owned one of the properties; the largest. He paid about 2.1 million for the property and one year later he told me that he wanted 14 million. The Pauls property was appraised at about 3.3 million. Then we met with the City of Minnetrista every Saturday for months to see if we could come up with a compromise. We came up with a compromise of two choices for the amount of land to be acquired. I think one was 232 acres, and one was 236 acres. Our Board met in a Special Session and adopted the revised plans. We went to the City Council meeting later that evening. The City Council members, who had been part of our meetings and said they would support it, did not support it and so the Council did not pass it. At that point, we decided to pursue the 292 acres and we were successful.

MW: A marvelous acquisition and it's a great story to hear how the inside of that process really worked. You had another one that probably wasn't as hard, but equally as beautiful; Gale Woods Farm Park. Tell us about that acquisition.

DB: I don't remember who got the call; if it was Chair Deane, or Joan Peters, or Rosemary Franzese or if I got the call, but we got a call from the Gale family. Al Gale wanted to honor his dad who was a United States Congressman. They wanted to donate some land; they wanted some tax credits, and so on and so forth. So Rosemary, Joan, Jim Deane and I met with the Gale family. We had some wonderful discussions and they ended up donating 410

acres to the Park District. The land is on Whaletail Lake. It's a beautiful acquisition and a wonderful gift. Some of the land has conservation easements on it to protect some of the Gale's interests, but for the most part it was dedicated to agricultural education; that's what Tom [McDowell] would call it. But it turned out to be a wonderful facility. It gets a lot of use and it is my understanding that it has grown. We added some capital improvements, the last of which was approved before I left, for the education center.

MW: The education wing.....

DB: The educational wing. I've been there and looked at it. It's wonderful; the barn, the pavilion, the whole site, and all the activities. The staff is doing a marvelous job. I've been there with my grandchildren and it's just a marvelous facility. We're very fortunate to have it. I think the estimated value of the property that the Gale family gave us was about \$40 million.

MW: An amazing gift.

DB: Amazing gift.

MW: Another acquisition you had was The Landing. It was Historic Murphy's Landing and then it was called The Landing. Now that's a whole different story, but a wonderful addition to the Park District.

DB: Yes, there are a lot of stories. In my opinion, as you build Three Rivers, as a special park district and it's the only one in the state, when someone knocks on your door, my approach with the Board members was always that, "We ought to look and listen." There were lots of knocks on our door for projects that we decided not to pursue, because they really didn't have a regional significance or they didn't fit within our enabling legislation or our mission. But one day, I got a call from Dave Unmacht, the Scott County Administrator, who was a wonderful supporter. He asked if we would ever be willing to consider taking over Historic Murphy's Landing. My response was "well, maybe." I talked to the Board members about it to make sure that I was on solid ground. Then we started meetings. Our Board Chair, I think it was Jim Deane or it might have been David [Dombrowski] in the

early stages, started having meetings and we toured the facility. We started talking about “What if?” When you think about a special park district and what that means, it’s not just about 30,000 or 36,000 acres of land, or whatever the total will be when we’re done acquiring. It’s not just about interpretive education or golf; it’s about a broad range of opportunities that attract the many interests of our constituents. But, the Park District is [also] about a strong program of interpretive education. We have a very strong position and The Landing just seemed to fit. So we received it, I believe, for one dollar.

MW: I was going to ask you how much, it didn’t cost a lot.

DB: We preserved this land on the Minnesota River and there were dreams, at that time, that someday a paddle-boat would be acquired and we would have paddle-boat rides from the Historic Farm to Fort Snelling and back. We had talked about spending a million dollars a year over a period of 15 years to rebuild the Historic Murphy’s Landing. It’s really a wonderful story. If that land would not have been set aside for by the Park District and preserved, it would have been lost. In Minnesota, we have lost so much of our historical significance in terms of buildings and landmarks. Many of them have been torn down and removed. But if you go to the City of St. Louis, there is an abundance of history there. It was an opportunity, even though the buildings, for the most part, were in bad shape. You have to dream and look down the road. I hope that the Park District will continue to develop this site, because someday it could be a significant interpretive education site for the metropolitan area.

MW: As it should be. We’re going to talk about that link to the Minnesota River a little bit later as well. How about the last big parcel which was Silverwood Park, a new special recreation feature. How did you get into that one?

DB: Well, as I said before, people knocked on our door a lot. When I talked to Board and staff members, we’d brainstorm on these things. A lot of it had to do with fit and location. I was familiar with the Silverwood property. Initially, I got a call from Greg Mack, Ramsey County Director of Parks and Recreation, who told me that the County didn’t have the

financial ability to pursue its acquisition. He asked us if we would be interested, because St. Anthony is part of the Park District. For years we talked about a first-tier regional park. We tried to acquire the hospital property in Golden Valley right next to Theodore Wirth Park and we were very close. Dave Dombrowski and I worked many hours on Saturdays trying to acquire it by negotiating with Sumitomo, who had the title to the property. We just couldn't get it done which was terribly unfortunate, because now it's all developed into housing. That's fine, but it would have been a great regional park. At any rate, we were initially contacted by Greg Mack. Our Board talked about having a presence on the east side of our regional park system of the Park District, so we submitted a bid. We did an appraisal and submitted a bid to the Salvation Army. We were the fourth highest bid, I believe. The Salvation Army wanted to see that land preserved for recreational use. They decided to accept our bid, which was just under 8 million dollars, even though it wasn't the highest, and we agreed to fulfill our obligations and develop it. At that time, The Salvation Army wanted to relocate their camp to a much more rural area, not in a highly urbanized area. They wanted to acquire additional land, etc. Just to tell you a quick story, I'm on the Leach Lake Area Watershed Foundation. I toured a site in northern Minnesota, as part of a group of Board members. It was the site that the Salvation Army was going to acquire. Now we are trying to acquire it for the State of Minnesota DNR [Department of Natural Resources]. It's a beautiful piece of property. As it turns out, the Salvation Army changed leadership and they decided not to acquire that piece of property. In fact, they tried to re-acquire the piece of property that they sold to us [the Park District]. We told them, "No, we're not interested." The site was reasonably expensive. It's limited by size, but yet if you believe in the system plan of having facilities located geographically throughout the region and system, it was a great fit. So, we acquired it. Later we were able to get funding set, about 15 million dollars, and it's currently in the process of being developed. It's a wonderful acquisition.

Future Board members have to be cautious about judging facilities that are yet to be acquired or newly developed based upon their early success or failure, because it takes time for people to find out that these facilities are open. Gale Woods Farm is an example. The Elm Creek Recreation Area is another, and the Salvation Army property will be one too. With the population growth in the metropolitan area and the rising cost of gasoline, people are having less and less dollars to travel. As a result, the regional park system in the metropolitan area and, specifically the Park District, are going to serve more and more people. The system will become more critical for recreational and educational needs and opportunities. If you look at the vision of the Park District when it was created, at the long term vision, and even in the years when the Park District acquired thousand of acres, people were asking, "What in the world are you going to do with it all?" When I started with the Park District, park use was under two million people per year and now it's over six. To be very honest, in five years it will probably be eight or ten million. Those were all things that were destined to happen. Lands were acquired and some of it's preserved for natural resource management. But, the lands acquired for recreation, once it was developed, resulted in "If you build it, they will come." That's exactly what's happening. We have a great staff and people are doing a marvelous job. I hope that the Park District will keep this vision in mind as it deals with today's challenges as well as into the future. I hope they will continue to rehabilitate the system, keep it up-to-date, and not walk away from opportunities that fit in the future, even if they are controversial.

MW: Those are some really phenomenal developments and I think your prediction of "build it and they will come" has proved true. In addition to acquiring big land masses, you provided vision and leadership to some great innovative developments: visitor centers, swim ponds, lighted cross-country ski trails, golf courses, clubhouses, maintenance facilities and the Administrative Center. No one else had taken on a maintenance facility until you did. What was your vision with these facilities and what do you think brought the success to those developments?

DB: Well again, I can't emphasize enough about having Board members that would listen to me and staff make recommendations about what we, as professionals in this field, felt needed to happen for us to fulfill our enabling legislation and the vision that was set forth many years ago. First and foremost, and I can talk about each of these developments. Maintenance Facilities. Our maintenance facilities were very poor at best. When you consider the importance of our maintenance division relative to providing services to the public, it was essential. We had to deal with that problem. We have three divisions and we needed division centers in each division. Staff needed facilities to maintain equipment, store supplies, and do their jobs. So we embarked upon a plan, which is not very popular whether its city government, county, or the Park District, to develop and maintain divisional centers and then deal with park maintenance buildings as time and money provided. One of the things that I'm very proud of is that the Board, through their great support by blessing the funding for these projects, we were able to get the division centers done which allowed our maintenance people to have the right facilities and equipment to do their jobs.

The Administrative Center/Headquarters used to be located in French Regional Park and staff had really outgrown it. We were looking at an expensive proposition to expand the building, with the understanding that someday the Park District would outgrow it again. The site we were at had limitations for parking and access. So, the question is, "Do you build a facility and expand it there and then later have a building that you don't know what to do with, or do you look at other options?" Even though there was some opposition to the idea, especially from staff members, we decided to acquire a building outside of a park. The idea was to invest in a quality public facility and at some point in time when we outgrew it, if we couldn't develop it to a larger size, we could sell it and acquire another site. It wouldn't be wasteful and it seemed to be the right thing to do. The Board talked about it at great length and we knew we had a major issue. So we moved forward in this direction and the building, the Administrative Center, was the right price at the right time. Some people like the building and some people don't, but it provides a great Administrative Center for the

Park District. The good news is that financially, if we outgrow it and the City of Plymouth won't let the Park District expand it, then we can sell it and take the money to reinvest into a new site. Economically, it just seemed like a wise thing to do. The Board supported it and we got it done.

MW: Tell me about swim ponds. Two big swim ponds were developed. What was the vision for swim ponds?

DB: The first one, which is at Lake Minnetonka, happened through the battles of the park. When I started as Superintendent, the master plan for the park was drawn up and there were different versions. Once we settled on 292 acres, it was finalized. The master plan for a public swim area did not meet Metropolitan Council standards. So, we were trying to figure out how in the world we were going to get a public access on Lake Minnetonka, which was the number one issue with many legislators and elected officials. How were we going to get a public access into that area without dramatically changing the topography or eliminating a lot of trees? We also had the Vern Gagne home to deal with. So at that point, we discussed, "What about an upland swim pond?" This might have been Don DeVeau's idea. We looked at the technology and we built it. We were criticized for that because the swim facility was not on the lake, but we could not accomplish and fulfill the Metropolitan Council guidelines/standards, unless we built the upland swim pond. Then, we put the access down by the lake which limited the negative impact on the park's resources. It worked out great. We had to make some modifications to the swim pond at Lake Minnetonka after we were operational for a year, but we fixed it and I think it's a wonderful facility.

MW: You also put the play area near the swim pond.

DB: The USS Minnetonka. That was a special play area design. We asked Don DeVeau and the planning and engineering staff to create the play area with a boat or ship theme, so that it would fit into the site. As very creative people, they were able to come up with the design. I've been there with my grandchildren and it's a marvelous design.

Later on we were dealing with Elm Creek Park Reserve and we decided to do the second prototype of a swim pond. The water quality of Elm Creek is so bad, that we looked at all kinds of options on improving the water quality, even putting a liner on the lake. It went on and on and on. We looked at the finances of all the options and decided to build another upland swim pond. Elm Creek is a wonderful park reserve of 5,500 acres with a water presence, but in an area where swimming didn't fit with the water bodies located on site. So were able to come up with a creative plan to provide swimming, which is one of the requirements of a recreational area development site. It's just a wonderful facility. Again, my hats are off to the planning and development staff, our consultants for the Park District for coming up with such a great design, and the Board's willingness to support it financially. Good things don't happen unless people are willing to take risks and spend the dollars necessary to get facilities open and operational. In fact, the Park District will never fulfill its mission, if risk taking does not continue to be an element of policy-setting.

MW: Doug, I also remember snowmaking on cross-country ski trails. People told you, "Oh, we can't do that, it just won't work." I remember you saying, "Do it, figure out a way." Tell us about your belief that this idea could happen.

DB: I'm sure that I've been strongly influenced by my experiences and the people around me. All ideas aren't mine, but when I hear a good idea, I'm not afraid to pursue it. It seemed to me that, having the parks close at five o'clock when people were working until five or six o'clock, and not being able to cross-country ski, that we needed lighted trails. We did it and it was an enormous success. We had winters of no snow or marginal snow, and they still said we couldn't do it. So what do you do? At Elm Creek we talked about snowmaking and we decided that we could afford it. It was a risk, it was a gamble, but again great things don't happen unless you take risks. By the way, that's not a crap-shoot. You do your homework, work with the policy makers, and allow a great deal of input from maintenance, law enforcement, planning and engineering, operating staff and you come up with a plan. You have a solid plan and the question is addressed whether you think it'll

work or not work. But at some point, somebody has to believe in it and authorize staff to go forward and finance it. So at Elm Creek, we decided to finance our first ski trail snowmaking project. It just didn't make any sense that it wouldn't work, but it was a gamble. We had winters with no snow and people had no place to ski. Now keep in mind that at Elm Creek, the public had already invested in millions of dollars worth of land. There is a great deal of infrastructure already there. But in the wintertime, which is one of our primary seasons, are we going to accept the fact that people wouldn't be able to use that facility because we had no snow? It didn't make any sense. So, it's not about the \$5 million dollars that we invested in snowmaking. We had invested millions of dollars into the acquisition and development of the Park. Didn't we have an obligation to make sure we had a winter opportunity for the public? So the Board supported it and we moved ahead with the development of the snowmaking. From what I can see, it's an enormous success. There will be years when we won't need it and somebody will say, "Oh that was a waste of money." Not so. Over a period of years it will serve thousands and thousands of park users during winters with no or minimal snowfall. I think there was a plan developed for Hyland Lake Park Reserve. I would hope that at some point in the near future the Park District would strongly consider moving ahead. That way you have one in the north division and one in the south and geographically, people have the opportunity to utilize these beautiful parks for winter recreation.

MW: A great vision to get the second one accomplished.

DB: It makes sense.

MW: Doug, I believe the only regional trail we had when you started was between Coon Rapids Dam and Elm Creek regional parks, about 6.6 miles that you helped to acquire. When you left, we had probably 70 to 90 miles of regional trails. You were significantly involved in most of the acquisition and development of these trails which now serve 2.1 million people. Tell us about your early discussions on the vision for the regional trail system.

DB: Well, when I was a municipal parks director, we'd have public meetings. When I was in Maple Grove, we spent a lot of money to develop the system. Parks and recreation was the number one rated city service in Maple Grove when I was there, and I think it still is today. Trails were heavily utilized and always a high priority to the citizens. People who wouldn't use parks for any other reason would use trails. At that time Jim Deane was the Mayor of Maple Grove and a strong trail development supporter. He really had an influence on my thinking. When I came to the Park District and thought about all the park and trail uses, it was number one. Trail use would grow. As a park system, we have an obligation to provide a diverse list of recreational and educational opportunities. We started looking at the system in terms of where we could go. We started moving in areas of acquisition and working with the cities with great Board support.

MW: You had many plans.

DB: In some cases it was very difficult, because we were crossing front yards. When we looked at the Dakota Rail Regional Trail, somebody said to me once, "Boy, what a great trail that would be and the Park District ought to pursue it." Again, it was something that we had considered, but we had a full plate. We took a look at it again and it just made a great deal of sense. We took a train ride out on the Dakota Rail and holy buckets; when you saw what the opportunity was and consider the amount of use, I think it's a perfect example of what trails do for a special park district, even though there was a lot of opposition to it. I can't emphasize that enough because we are special, the Park District is special. I say "we" because I'll always feel like I'm part of it, even though I'm retired and long gone.

MW: What about the two big trail corridors you worked with the Railroad Authority on? That was a major accomplishment.

DB: A major accomplishment. We condemned again and we haven't used that often. The Railroad Authority is very difficult to work with, if we're talking about the Union Pacific Railroad. We've done some work with the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority and the Hennepin County Board was always wonderful to work with as well. So that was a

positive thing. But we had to condemn some property to get some trails developed. We worked with cities and, in some cases, we got right-of-ways. It was just a great plan. Why was it a great plan? Because the trails are going to serve millions of people. The Dakota Trail, again, is a perfect example. When we started talking about it, some cities like Orono were highly supportive and there were other cities that were really against it. The reason it hadn't happened before, even though the rail line was only used once or twice a day as it was in terrible condition, some communities didn't want trail users coming through their communities. Believe me, the hope was that some day the active rail line would put it up for sale and it would be sold off in parcels, piece-meal style. That would eliminate the opportunity to build a regional trail. But we looked at it, the Board talked about it, and we considered our funding. We talked about it as a staff and pursued it. It's done today, for the most part, and it's an enormous accomplishment. It's an example of what happens when you do your homework, have a good fit, take the risk, and do it. And when it opens, for the most part, the public embraces it. Was there controversy? Yes. Was there opposition? Yes, but there was a great deal of support. When you think about my career, 20 years with the Park District and the things that we accomplished as an organization, the things that are significant always had opposition. It was always difficult to find the funding and how we were going to fund the operating costs. But was it the right thing to do? Yes, it was when you consider the cost per taxpayer versus the benefit to the region. And again, making sure that you make an educated decision on what fits and what doesn't. These have been just wonderful decisions and the Dakota Trail is a perfect example. There are legislators out there that hate Lake Minnetonka Regional Park. It's because their constituents in a small geographic area didn't want it. The park serves more than one geographic area. They are not municipal parks. They are regional facilities and that park is going to be an enormous success for years and years.

MW: Talk a little bit about the politics during your reign as the Superintendent of the Park District. You talked about many relationships with cities, but what about the visibility at the

legislature and with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. Talk about the politics of it all.

DB: When I was hired I was on a two year contract and I had a young family. What happens to the Superintendent is you make decisions; how far do you push, how hard do you push, what do you recommend, what don't you recommend. Is it about you and your family, your security and longevity, or is it about the Park District? I would work closely with the Board and there were occasions when they would say, "No, we're not interested, we don't think it's a good fit." But they would give me and staff our day in court. So, it's a fine line that you walk, but the Board was always gracious in listening to my ideas. The Board, under the leadership of Dave Dombrowski and Jim Deane, was wonderful in sticking with policy decisions and allowing staff to do the work. We had disagreements, we had arguments and lots of extended discussions during my time as Superintendent, but it was within what's best for the Park District and how do we get this done. It was not about personal interests or specific districts where people were elected. It was about the Park District. The early Boards, at times, like when we got into Lake Minnetonka and some of the other decisions that we made, I wondered if I would survive because I was on a two year contract. I worried about that a lot, because I had a young family. But on the other hand, I felt compelled that I had to do my job because I worked with Boards and Chairs. The two Chairs in particular, Dave and Jim, allowed me to do my job and I think collectively, a lot of wonderful decisions were made. From time to time, we had to address personal agenda of elected officials, but in the end, the Park District prevailed.

MW: What do you think about the Park District's relationship with the Legislature during the time you were there and how did that change? What was that relationship?

DB: For the most part it was very good, but it's very discomfoting to be at the legislature and asked to testify at a committee hearing about a funding request or a bill that you're trying to pass. Understand that there are people elected that represent specific geographic areas. So, when we're looking at a regional facility, there are people out there that

represent a small area within that region. It's very disheartening when you think you have a great project and you find opposition; whether it's Lake Minnetonka or Dakota Rail. But if you look at the big picture, the long-term impact, our mission and vision, you battle and you fight those fights. Senator Gen Olson was adamantly opposed to Lake Minnetonka Regional Park. She said she supported it on a willing-seller basis, but that was impossible to do. The Pauls family owned the property for one or two years and then we acquired it. He acquired it for about three million, no, two million. He wanted \$14 million dollars for it and on and on and on. We couldn't afford to do it under state law. So, it never felt good to get into arguments with legislators who were defending their turf. You understood why and you respected that, but it was difficult because you still believed in the project and were trying to move forward to get it done. So you allow them to oppose as long as they understand that we believe our job is to get it approved, built and open. We were successful on Lake Minnetonka. Dakota Rail is another example of this and there have been many other examples along the way.

MW: What do you think about the Park District's relationship with Hennepin County and the importance of it during your time?

DB: In 1985, I was the Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Maple Grove. At that time the County was proposing to take over the Park District. I was one of the people that testified at the Legislature in opposition. As it turns out, the Park District was not taken over by the County, but the District's enabling legislation was changed so that the County had two appointees out of a total of seven Board members and budget considerations under the new law. They could line-item veto the budget and our Board could override it with a five-sevenths vote; so that all changed. When I started, we had a terrible relationship with the County Board. Mona Moede was our Budget and Finance Committee Chair and Dave Dombrowski was our Board Chair. We went to meeting after meeting to build bridges and build support. I remember one meeting; County Commissioner Randy Johnson had lots of concerns about law enforcement. We had just

replaced our Chief and he wanted to know what that meant. I was grilled, and grilled, and grilled with Dave and Mona present. But we went to work, rolled up our sleeves and built a strong relationship with the County Board that allowed us to continue to be a special park district. Even to this day I get calls from County Commissioners who asked me about parks and recreation. I try to stay out of the Park District's business. I try not to get involved in that, but I still have a good relationship with them. For the Park District to survive, we have to have a strong relationship with Hennepin County. Does it mean that the Park District is going to be under the County? I think it's better for the Park District to remain autonomous for budget reasons and otherwise. It doesn't mean though that we can't work with them or the Railroad Authority. It doesn't mean that the Chair of the County Board can't call up the Superintendent and voice an opinion. Penny Steele used to call me all the time. Mark Stenglein used to call me all the time. Mike Opat would call me on occasion. Once in a while I'd go down to their office by myself or with Dave Dombrowski to answer questions. Once in a while I'd be invited to a Board Meeting to answer questions. They always treated me with a great deal of respect and frankly, I think when I left we had a very, very good relationship. I received a wonderful resolution from the County Board when I retired. Somebody said to me once a long time ago, and I think it's true, whether it's the political world or internal staff politics, you're going to crack a few eggs to make an omelet. I think that's just very, very true. If you really want to create something that's special and unique that's going to serve thousands of people regionally, along the way you're going to stub your toe. You're going to have opposition and you're going to crack a few eggs. Dakota Rail is a perfect example and frankly, Lake Minnetonka is a perfect example. Senator Gen Olson would have never supported it. Ultimately, it was approved and built against her wishes. The fact of the matter is, it's a huge success. The other thing that I've always remembered is somebody told me once, "No good deed goes unpunished." I think that's also true.

MW: You mentioned earlier that when you started, the Park District was just barely cresting on two million people served and when you left it was over five million. What do you attribute all that growth to?

DB: I think a couple of things. I think that's destiny even though there are people in the natural resource world that think I'm just a recreation guy. I was just adamant about recreation. I think that we acquired and developed facilities that support interpretive education and natural resource management, as much as recreation.

MW: What do you attribute this growth to?

DB: When you look back in time when the Park District was created, there was this wonderful vision. We should not lose track of that vision. We should not lose track of the Founding Fathers and what they believed would happen some day. That includes Clif French, the father of this park system. When the land started to be acquired, some of it was acquired to be preserved in its natural state. We have a very strong 80/20 policy and I hope that never changes. We should not move away from that policy. If we need more areas for actual recreation, we ought to look at acquisition. So, there is a strong position on natural resource management, and preservation, and for providing recreational lands. When the Park District started acquiring land, the hand-writing was on the wall. It was inevitable. When I came along, it was time to start developing. You know the old cliché, "If you build it, they will come." I had news for the Park District. If they continue to maintain the facilities the way they have in the last 20-years plus, and build a diversity of opportunities, they will continue to come and park use will grow. It would not surprise me in five or ten years if the Park District were serving over ten million people a year. I realize that's going to challenge the staff and Board on operating and capital funds, but that's why this system was created.

MW: As a special park district, to respond to that [demand].

DB: I'll use an example; the snowmaking at Hyland. I don't know what the final tab was, five million, but when you consider the investment today for the land, buildings, and staff,

five million dollars is a drop in the bucket when you consider that the land alone is worth hundreds of millions of dollars. And when you consider how many people it will serve annually and what each of these unique facilities do, it just becomes a “no-brainer.” I realize that we’re in tough economic times and we have to make sound fiscal decisions, but it doesn’t mean that we sit on our hands. We have to keep moving in the right direction.

MW: You were a member of professional organizations throughout your career; the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), Minnesota Recreation and Park Association (MRPA), and National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials (NACPRO). How did those professional affiliations benefit you?

DB: Well, they were great. When I was in municipal parks and recreation, I loved MRPA. I was very active in a lot of committees and in a lot of different capacities. I was the State Athletic Chairman. I was in charge of exhibits and on conference committees. I was Vice President, blah, blah, blah. But when I came here, I didn’t have a lot of time. Secondly, when I wasn’t at work, I was with my family. In MRPA we talked about athletics and municipal parks, but there wasn’t a lot about big park systems.

MW: Even though you didn’t have the time, you did inspire your staff to take up those professional challenges on behalf of the District.

DB: We did and the Board supported that. We developed a policy whereby the Park District paid for so much of an individual’s membership to MPRA. I know you and others were very active and I think that’s really important. But, in terms of the conference, it was hard for me to justify three days of my time when we were so busy. I spent so much time away from my family. I think MRPA is really important and it had a wonderful influence on my life when I was active in it. Then I found an organization called NACPRO (National Association of Park and Recreation Officials), and all of the sudden, holy buckets. I’d go to meetings and their tours. I’d see issues and challenges that Three Rivers was facing. I met people that had similar jobs and it was great. We became more active in the Special Park Districts Forum (SPDF) and the year that Linda died, we hosted it. Staff did a marvelous

job. So, because I was so busy, I didn't pursue being President of MRPA or on the NACPRO Board. But I was an active member and I think they're all great.

MW: Talk about the networking; the visions you saw as you traveled around the county and the inspirations for ideas.

DB: Years ago, people here used to say the Park District was one of the finest park systems in the country and yet it was just land. There was no development and park use was a million and a half a year. So, we went to work. When you travel around the country today and look at Three Rivers and what's out there, this park system is one of the finest park systems in this country.

MW: You've been recognized nationally and by the University of Minnesota. We'll talk about three of the major awards that you received. One is the William Penn Mott Jr. award for excellence from the National Park and Recreation Association in 2006. An extraordinary award named after a unique individual to recognize your accomplishments. The Alumni Award at the University of Minnesota, which is a very rare accomplishment for a Park and Recreation Director in the State of Minnesota. Also, you received the Lifetime Award from the National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials. What are your thoughts on receiving these awards?

DB: Well, the only reason I got those awards is because of you. [laughing]

MW: I don't think so. [laughing]

DB: I've said this before; all those awards mean a great deal to me, but those awards really weren't about me per-say. They were about us, about what we accomplished as an organization. We were able to focus on our mission and vision, and work together to accomplish a great deal. That's what those awards were about. The one that really means the very, very most to me is the one I got from the University of Minnesota. When I was in high school, I was a decent student and very active. I was President of the class and involved in athletics. Then I went to the University to play football. I was seventeen when I started. I kind of lost my way and decided to quit. I spent some time in the Army and

when I came back, I rolled up my sleeves and went back to school. Linda and I gutted our way through it and I'm proud that I'm an honor student. It wasn't just parks and recreation; it was a lot of natural resource courses and business administration. It's always been something that I've been proud of, that I worked hard for. I was at the dinner with my fiancé and my children and their wives when I received the University award. Most of the people there were "academicians"; they were professors and university presidents. I kind of laughed about that. I got the award because you nominated me.

MW: No Doug, I didn't nominate you. I don't know who did. We got the call to put an application together, but it's still a mystery where the nomination came from.

DB: It's a reflection and I'm very proud of that. I've got it on my desk in my home. It's a reflection of what the Park District has become. The Park District is made up of a lot of staff people who breathe and live for what it is. They have dedicated their life's work to this organization. They take it seriously. We now serve over six million people. That number is going to grow. It's made up of Board members who, yes, get a modest salary, but for the most part donate hours and hours and hours of time. It's a wonderful organization and I think that award represents the great things that we were able to accomplish over twenty years. I'm proud that I received it and it was very moving. But I really think it's a reflection of what we did collectively and that's not "BS", that's the way I feel.

MW: I know you do.

DB: It's too bad that we couldn't give out an award to every single person and Board member.

MW: Well you did that one year. Instead of nominating an individual for the MRPA Award, you said, "Nope, I want to nominate my whole Board."

DB: And they got the award. You know, in municipal parks and recreation, parks are not the number one priority; natural resources isn't the number one priority; nor recreation and education. Here (pointing to heart) Three Rivers is the number one priority, and for that to be successful, the Board and staff has to be willing to step up to that and keep the Park

District special. When I started in Brooklyn Center, Gene Hagle used the word embellishment. I never really understood what that meant until I started working here. There were lots of days where I felt like an artist, when I'd be in staff meetings listening to ideas and views. I'd look out the windows, like we are today at Baker, and look at this beautiful, beautiful landscape. As we look at what we do, look at what's here, I think there is great energy and encouragement to continue to do great things within the Park District. We are clearly a unique organization. Again, I think those awards are wonderful, but they really represent our success. It's too bad that they couldn't go to everybody, because they really belong to everybody.

MW: I know you've said that numerous times throughout your career. We've heard you say it and I know that's very sincere. But, we had to have a leader and you provided that leadership and deserve those recognitions.

DB: It was my family that supported me. I spent a lot of time away from my family. When I was not at work, I was with my family. When Linda died, I really hit a huge glitch in my life. She was a wonderful supporter and wife. I stumbled for a long while and then I felt like I got back on track and was re-energized. Thankfully, Board members, especially Jim Deane, my sons Jesse and Jonathon, and fiancé Lynda Jordan, as well as some staff members helped me get through some real depression and we moved on down the road. I love the Park District and I love the people here. We all give so much of our life. But there came a point in time after all those battles, all those closed door meetings, all the meetings at the legislature, the nights and weekends, defending what we do and why we do it, that I just reached a point where I felt it was somebody else's turn. Commissioners were probably getting tired of me pushing and some, I think, were tired of me of getting awards, even though I would share the wealth. Maybe they felt that it wasn't quite right, I don't know. But we accomplished a lot and continued to achieve through it all. Even when I lost Linda, the staff and Board still continued to achieve and the Park District is a great organization. My heart says, "Let no man destroy the mission and vision that was created

and that we have taken great strides to achieve. Let there be Three Rivers Park District and let it serve millions of people and continue to preserve the natural resources and history of this land for generations to come.”

I know how my grandchildren feel when I take them to Gale Woods, Lowry Nature Center or Elm Creek in the winter to slide. They absolutely love it. I was standing in line this winter at Elm Creek and nobody knew that I used to be Superintendent. Nobody cared and that’s fine. I listened to people’s comments about the winter recreation area and the tubing facility, which was a controversial idea. There wasn’t one around here. Who’s going to gamble on that? I look around and there were hundreds of people stacked on top of each other and everybody’s just saying, “My gosh is this fun. What a wonderful place.” You see all the cross-country skiers and so you know Three Rivers is a great place. I hope that it’ll stay that way.

MW: Any other messages to the Park District?

DB: My only message is, and I really feel this way, that no one’s perfect. God didn’t make us perfect. We all have our strengths and weaknesses. Collectively we work through that and we do good things. I feel very blessed that I had the opportunity to spend 20 years here. I know that during my period of time I probably pushed too hard at times. I probably didn’t always have the best or ideal method to get something done, but I was dealing with a lot of other factors around me. There was a lot of input from Board members and other agencies. I’m proud to be part of it and that the Board and staff put up with me for 20 years. We achieved great things including the elimination of park entrance fees, a name change that fits, and a “AAA” bond rating and strong financial position which we haven’t talked about today.

In the end, I knew it was time in my heart for me to move on. I was ready and I still have bouts with depression about the loss of Linda. I still miss her. Lynda Jordan accepts that. She misses Don. Lynda Jordan is a very special person and collectively we deal with our losses and move on with our loves and lives together along with our families and friends.

So, we move down the road on our merry way, but in my heart there's a special place for this organization. I hope it's here for generations to come and that should never be treated lightly by anyone. When this was created, they created something special. I'm not just using the legislative wording. They created something unique and different, and the people have embraced it. Let's continue to build it and keep it as strong as it can be. That's what I hope. Let no elected/appointed official put their agenda ahead of what's best for the Park District and its constituents.

MW: Well, looking back Doug, it's exciting to hear all the stories and how it was all put together. I hope you feel from the interview, what great accomplishments you led and were able to be a part of. I hope you see what we have resulted in to date.

DB: Well, if there's anything that I would end with, it would be to suggest that we use the word "we," because what we see here is a great effort by a lot of people; policy-makers for sure, staff, citizen support, and so on and so on. But I think the key word is "we" and if anybody ever loses track of that, they really don't understand how things get done. I think that's the thing that I'm most proud of; the methods and the route from point A to point B, which was maybe not always ideal, but we got there. The proof is in the pudding and we got a lot done.

MW: Well, you're a significant part of the history. We'll probably never see a Superintendent serve that length of time again in the history of the Park District. It's been significant.

DB: Yes, it's been interesting.

MW: It would probably never happen, because the years and experience that we would require for that job now is a lot different. I think you grew with it and we'll probably never see that again. You're the longest serving Superintendent.

DB: I don't know if you know this story. One week after I was offered the job as Acting Superintendent I quit, because legislatively we had all kinds of problems with Lake Minnetonka. I came in the middle of that. Shirley Bonine was Chair at that point in time.

I'd been on the job one week and we spent a day at Spring Hill where the Board members, for seven and one-half hours, told me what their expectations were. I had half an hour to summarize what I had hoped and we all agreed. One of the things that had to stop was the back-biting and nonsense that was happening at the legislature. One week after I started, it was raging and out of control. So I just called up Shirley and said, "I quit, I'm done, I don't want the job." Five minutes later I got a call from two Commissioners. We met for breakfast and talked. That's really the beginning of the trust. We still fought and had our battles, but the Board set policy and allowed staff to do our work. There was a high level of trust and back-biting stopped for the most part. Dave Dombrowski and Jim Deane did a fantastic job with other Board members and their conduct. Later, Shirley no longer served as Chair and David stepped in. David Dombrowski, a guy that probably doesn't have a lot of parks of recreation background, was a significant member of this organization. Everything that I was involved with and in what we accomplished, he certainly played a hand along with other Board members. I learned how to work at the legislature. David always worked. He would tell you that he worked way behind the front lines and that's what we would do. We would talk to key legislators and we would work. We'd spend hours, even on Saturdays. So David Dombrowski deserves a great deal of credit and every Board member as well. Jim Deane deserves a lot of credit, because he too allowed staff to do their job and the Board to set policy. When you move away from that, an organization starts to erode. It's just very clear. It's not rhetoric. You go down the employee and Board member list; so many people that have worked here, contributed, and accomplished great things. They loved this place and the reason they loved it is because it's a great place. We all contributed to its greatness. When we retire, that's what we'll walk away with in our heart. It isn't that I did this or I did that, it's "Holy buckets, I was part of this." I think that's what David and Jim would tell you too.

MW: Well, thank you.

DB: Thank you.

David Dombrowski
Former Park District Commissioner and Chair
1988 - 2002
Narrator

Margie Walz
Three Rivers Park District
Interviewer

August 7, 2008
Baker National Golf Course
Medina, Minnesota

MW: Well David, to start with, we're going to ask you a little bit about your background. Where did you grow up and how did you get to the Twin Cities or when did you come to Twin Cities?

DD: I was born in Northeast Minneapolis and I lived there until I was eleven or twelve years old. Then I moved to Ham Lake, which is in Anoka County, and went to high school at Coon Rapids.

MW: You went to high school at Coon Rapids. Did you do your college work here?

DD: I did my college work at the University of Minnesota.

MW: What kind of degree did you pursue there?

DD: I received a degree in Industrial Relations.

MW: Why did you pick Industrial Relations?

DD: Because Industrial Relations was actually the job that I was doing. Then I went to college to get my degree.

MW: Tell us about your professional background. What was the kind of work that you did that led you to that degree and then, what did you do with that degree after that?

DD: I worked for the Airports Commission and I negotiated their labor contracts and also did all their intergovernmental work.

MW: Did you work for some other organizations doing that kind of thing or just the Airports Commission?

DD: Just the Airport.

MW: How long did you work for the Airports Commission?

DD: Thirty years.

MW: Thirty years. Alright. So how did you become interested in parks?

DD: Actually, two good friends of mine had [a] disagreement about what they thought they wanted to do with the Park Board. Both of them were Hennepin County Commissioners. I thought it would be a good idea for me to get involved and try to help the Park District because one of the Commissioners wanted to take their appointments off and the other one wanted to keep them on. So I decided to become one of the ones that they appointed.

MW: What got you interested in even being concerned about parks? Why did you have that concern?

DD: [pause] Well, because I've always thought parks were a good deal and when I grew up in Northeast Minneapolis I lived half a block from a park and spent a lot of my time at the park.

MW: Okay, so you were a park rat and you just thought you'd like to stay doing something with that. During your tenure as a Commissioner you represented Hennepin County as an appointed member and served during that time period from 1988 to 2002, is that correct?

DD: Yes.

MW: And why did you keep wanting to get re-appointed?

DD: I think because like everything else, you start something and then you have projects going and you get involved and you want to see the projects come to fruition. So you just continue to keep doing what you're doing.

MW: I remember some times that we've talked in the past, you said it sort of got in your blood once you got into it [laughs].

DD: Yes.

MW: What did you hope to accomplish personally? Did you have any visions for these years that you were on the Board? What was it giving back to you?

DD: Oh, I think the people that I got to meet, the people I got to deal with. Knowing that you could get things done in a reasonable fashion and make a better Park District and a better place for the Twin Cities.

MW: Who was on the Board when you were first appointed, do you remember?

DD: Sure. Mona Moede, Nick Eloff, Judith Anderson, Neil Weber, Shirley Bonine. And Robert Ellingson.

MW: In general, what were the Board meetings like when you first started and you weren't Chair right away? You started in eighty-eight, when did you become Chair?

DD: I'm not sure what year I first became chair.

MW: I think a couple of years later, or eighty-nine.

DD: Yes, one or two.

MW: One or two years later. What were Board meetings like when you first started your first year?

DD: Long.

MW: Long, okay [Laughing].

DD: I think because of my other job, having to sit through long meetings all of the time at either the Capitol in Washington or in St. Paul, I used to get frustrated with people repeating themselves and taking a long time to make decisions at Board meetings that you didn't have to, at least I never thought you had to, spend that much time doing.

MW: Having seen this in other governments, I would assume that it gave you the desire then when you became Chair to not let a meeting run like that?

DD: Yes.

MW: What kind of techniques did you use to not let a meeting run like that?

DD: I used to talk to the Board members ahead of time always to make sure that the votes were where they were supposed to be. [I also tried] to make sure that when the staff got up, they made very concise and complete reports, answered all of the Board members' questions, [and] made sure the Board didn't ask the same questions two or three times. I

was maybe a little heavy with the gavel, but I don't think so. [MW laughs]. I mean maybe I was.

MW: As a staff person who lived through most of those Board meetings, we did appreciate [laughs] that they were pretty much on target and very focused and sometimes they didn't take as long as some had in the past. What were some of the issues when you first came on the Board? What were we dealing with at that time?

DD: New Superintendent.

MW: Yes, new Superintendent. And your Superintendent was...?

DD: Who *was* the Superintendent?

MW: Douglas.

DD: Doug Bryant. Actually if I remember right, Doug got elected either the first or the second meeting I attended. So he was the Superintendent from the day I started.

MW: So you dealt with the appointment of a new Superintendent. What were some of those first issues? I'm going to think of one that might jar your brain that might have been at that time -- Lake Minnetonka Regional Park?

DD: No.

MW: No, that wasn't until the '90s?

DD: If I remember this right, there were some horse issues that Mona Moede had somewhere in the Park District.

MW: So, horseback riding issues.

DD: Always budget issues, budget issues. I don't think we did Lake Minnetonka until I became the Chair. I know that was a longstanding issue. It was a longstanding issue at the Park District, but I don't think we did anything about it until I became the Chair.

MW: We had that Park Foundation that was sort of falling apart at that time.

DD: That's right. We had the Park Foundation and they had a number of misgivings about a number of different issues. [But] I don't remember; I can't think of any.

MW: Those are pretty good. I didn't go back and look each one up, but that's pretty good. Let's talk about the first years now. Now we're moving into things like Lake Minnetonka in those first few years. Was there anything that you found particularly challenging either positively or negatively about being on the Board during those early years?

DD: Are you talking about just the Lake Minnetonka issue?

MW: Well, let's talk about Lake Minnetonka, because that's got to be a good story.

DD: Okay, let's talk about Lake Minnetonka. I've never been in favor of eminent domain, but in the Lake Minnetonka case, at least at one point in time, we had a willing seller for us to get some property on Lake Minnetonka. And through the process he, Vern Gagne, changed his mind. I remember about once every two or three months, I would go over to his house and talk to him to make sure that he was still okay with the eminent domain of the taking of his property. At first he was, and then his wife and he decided that maybe later on, they weren't so excited about that. Of course, by that time we were far enough into the process where we had decided we were going to do it. That troubled me, because I didn't think the government should just kind of willy-nilly take people's property. But obviously, for the good of the community as a whole, I thought it was important that the Park District have some presence on Lake Minnetonka and open the lake more to the public than it had been in the past.

MW: So you must have gotten involved with the legislature, because that's how you got the permission to do that?

DD: Correct.

MW: So, tell us about that relationship with the legislature at that time.

DD: Well, I think most of the legislators, obviously the ones that were representing people around the lake, were not in favor of this. It got to be quite a battle at the legislature with the votes and the committees and going through. But at the end, I think if I remember correctly, it passed fairly easily, both in the House and the Senate. I mean, after all the discussion and all the bantering back and forth.

MW: Did you personally get involved with some of the discussions with the legislators?

DD: Yes, I talked to a number of legislators [and] sat in or made presentations at the committee hearings.

MW: That was probably one of the historic challenges of the Park District of all time because it had been envisioned for so long to get property on Lake Minnetonka and you were able to do it during your tenure. Let's look at a positive one. We were sitting at Baker National and I think we were going through this process to develop this eighteen hole golf course right at the time when you came on the Board.

DD: I think the Park District was very fortunate to get the land from the Bakers. We decided that a golf course was what we should probably do because we had a number of golfers, including myself, on the Board, and saw the opportunity to put a first-class golf course in this area. Then we had to deal with all the cities that owned golf courses and all the private golf courses. We had to meet with those people and try to figure out a way where we wouldn't infringe on their bottom line as far as making money and work that out. This project has turned out just unbelievably well.

MW: It has, and I think the public has responded that they have a quality facility that's affordable to them that's really a true, classy public golf course. And I know, as a golfer, that we appreciate what the Board did at that time to bring this about for the community. Any other things that just sort of stick out during those first years, say the first five years? Any other big things?

DD: When did we do the Coon Rapids Dam?

MW: The Coon Rapids Dam was in the early nineties. You were Chair when we were working on the Coon Rapids Dam [DD Laughs]. Let's talk about the Coon Rapids Dam.

DD: [Laughing] Let's not talk about the Coon Rapids Dam.

MW: Let's talk about the Coon Rapids Dam. What do you remember about the issues surrounding the Coon Rapids Dam?

DD: [We had] a lot of meetings on the Coon Rapids Dam and we needed legislation for the Coon Rapids Dam. [There was a] long-time dispute or disagreement between Anoka County and Hennepin County on control of the Dam and how the Dam should be used and what we should do with the Dam. At one point, I was fairly well convinced that we should probably just take the Dam down. Then I was swayed or convinced that we should probably keep the Dam for hydro-power. Out of a number of projects that we were able to get done, the Coon Rapids Dam probably is the one that, if I could go back and change something, that is what I would go back and change.

MW: [Laughs]. I know that you were able to get that funding from the State to participate in the repair of the Dam. If you could have gone back, what would've you done?

DD: If I could back now, I probably would have torn the Dam down.

MW: And face the political...

DD: Yes, the political upheaval. I think that would have been the right decision because I think we are still having problems with the Coon Rapids Dam.

MW: Yes we still are.

DD: It's just, I mean it would have been...

MW: Kept the walkway...

DD: Yes, [we should have] kept the walkway and just got rid of the Dam, so you'd still have the connection from Anoka to Hennepin.

MW: That's a tough political battle with that.

DD: It was a very tough political battle and then to have it turn out the way it did.

MW: We've got the same battle, exactly the same...

DD: Do you?

MW: ...over and over. Every time you have to repair it, it's the same battle, the pool.

DD: And I'm sure people are still calling and saying, "Lower the water, raise the water."

MW: Yes. We still have the same [issues]. Well that's an interesting perspective, definitely an interesting perspective. Let's talk about the leadership of the Park District at

the time you were there. You had mentioned that Doug Bryant served contiguously with you, so you served at the same time.

DD: Right.

MW: Describe Doug Bryant and what you felt was unique about his leadership.

DD: [Doug is a] hard worker, stays on course, gets things done, digs in, get's the work done, great advocate for the park, good to work with. I enjoyed working with Doug immensely. He was very staff driven. Once the staff decided that's what they wanted, he was very convincing in most cases that that's what should get done. [He was] just a joy to deal with. I always enjoyed dealing with Doug.

MW: So you had a good relationship with Doug?

DD: Very good, yes, very good.

MW: How did you become Chair? You were an appointee of the County, how did you become Chair of this Board?

DD: We had some disputes going on in the first couple of years I was on the Board. There seemed to be a number of differences between people and nobody wanted to find middle ground. I'm not sure if I was approached or if I just said, "I'll run for the Board Chair and we'll go from there and see how that works." We had some fairly strong-willed people on the Board and I think what they needed was somebody that would stand up to them and say, "No, this is not a fair deal. We need to be a little more fair about how we're going to distribute the Committee Chairs, and who sits on what, and the power." So, I ended up running for Chair and winning after I think two or three years on the Board. [I] then served as Chair for ten years or whatever it was.

MW: Yes. Have you always found yourself going to the leadership position when you're involved in a group? Is it just sort of natural for you?

DD: Well, I never thought of it that way [laughs]. But yes, most organizations I belonged to, I was either the President or Chairman of the Board.

MW: So you feel like you can have a little more control and get things done then?

DD: I think if you spend enough time nurturing the other Board members so they don't feel left out and they don't feel like you're trying to drive stuff over them or through them, yes.

MW: Great. Okay. We talked about what you hoped to accomplish as a Board Chair. You had wanted to just leave a better park system and you wanted to do it efficiently and get things done. Any other things that you [did] as Board Chair?

DD: I think there's a number of parks and libraries and a number of things that are for the community. To make a better place overall for people is very important and they don't have enough spokespeople when it comes time to, like at the state legislature, divide the money up. I think it's important that people get up and tell whoever is going to split the money up that these are important issues and they need to be taken care of.

MW: Alright. Later in your career at the Park District, we had three significant regional parks open during your time. I'm going to talk about each of the projects and see what you remember, but we had a lot of development going on and new parks opening up. One was the Bryant Lake Regional Park. Any particular memories about Bryant Lake?

DD: No. I mean some of the issues would come up and they'd be relatively much easier than other issues...

MW: Yes, Like Bryant Lake.

DD: ...and Bryant Lake was not a lot of trouble. I mean it was all based on how much time and effort and meetings and things you had to go to, for me anyhow, and Bryant Lake was just a natural. Everybody wanted it. Everybody thought it was a good idea. The staff always did their due diligence work and so that was just one of those fun projects. That was a fun deal.

MW: And I would assume, was it similar for Fish and French, it was just more approving the money and approving the projects?

DD: Yes, just going out and finding the money and approving the projects, going out into the community and having everybody tell you how wonderful you are because they all wanted the parks.

MW: Yes, isn't that nice?

DD: Yes, those were fun.

MW: A contrast to Lake Minnetonka's development. Think about it, four major regional parks in our system during your time--those were big, big times for the Park District. The regional trail system really started kicking off during your time. Today we have probably a hundred miles of regional trail and I think when you started we had, between Coon Rapids Dam and Elm Creek, about six miles of regional trail and now it's just amazing. Last year we served 2.1 million people on that regional trail system. I know that even though probably seventy or eighty miles were developed during your time, you had plans for almost two hundred miles. Can you describe some of the meetings that you had? Maybe the LRT would be a good one to talk about. [Laughs].

DD: Yes [Laughing]. Well, I was an appointee to the County and the County had set aside a number of miles for the Light Rail Transit system which I was, and still am, a big proponent of. But, it was going to be years, needless to say, before any LRT was going to go down those trails. I spent a lot of time and went to a lot of meetings and luckily had a number of supporters on the County Board that were very much in favor of LRT, but saw that it wasn't going to happen. Fortunately we got Hennepin County to do a deal with us so we could use the LRT land that they used for trail corridors until such time that they would need it for Light Rail Transit. That was a hard project and a fun project, and obviously there were not a lot of people in the community I happened to live in who didn't want the trails. We ran into some people who didn't want the trails because of the view they had of the lake. Luckily, the mayor of the community I lived in and I were good friends. I told him if they didn't want it, we'd figure something else out and go around them -- and we did. Then, my neighbors came back to me and said, "We changed our mind." And I said, "Too bad" [Laughing]. That was an interesting project.

MW: And you personally spent a lot of time on that one as the Board Chair.

DD: Yes.

MW: I think you had some ups and downs, fits and starts on the Dakota Rail as well, right?

DD: Yes.

MW: And, it just didn't happen. We weren't able to pull it off during that time.

DD: No, which was too bad.

MW: Now, we've got it and it's probably the busiest trail. It's just a freeway of people.

Amazing. But I know that you went in to talk about politics with cities during that one as well.

DD: Right.

MW: What do you think of the Board's position on future regional trails? What do you think about these trails that we've put out there? Any advice to the Board?

DD: I think they're a great deal and they're worth the fight. They're worth whatever you have to do to get them. It's a huge great amenity to any city, to any county that has trails. Real estate dealers show you where the trails are. It's just a good deal. It's a given. It's like a gimme.

MW: And I think that's been proven. We just did an economic study of the value of land that is near trails and parks. The tax base around those [is generally higher], especially when you take care of them.

DD: Oh yes. Absolutely.

MW: The Board, I believe, has always given support for taking care of things well. Do you want to talk about your vision of not just providing [parks] but taking good care of them?

DD: Yes. If you don't do the maintenance anywhere in the system, it has a huge reflection on the whole system. If you go somewhere and it's not maintained and it's not well kept, and then you're trying to convince people that to do business with you is good for them, they don't believe you. Government in so many instances, [for example] highways, you see four guys sitting on a shovel -- everybody knows how that goes. If you don't take care of what you [have] when you're trying to convince people that this is a good deal, you better have had a good track record or you don't get what you want.

MW: That's so true. You received a couple awards during your time on the Board. One was [in] 1994, [where the] whole Board got the Minnesota Park & Recreation Association Board of Commissioner Award. Then I believe you individually got the Outstanding Public Official Award for the National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials.

DD: Yes.

MW: Tell us a little bit about your thoughts about receiving those awards.

DD: Fortunately I've received a lot of plaques and awards, none of which I've ever made the assumption was because of me. I mean, it's because of the staff here, because of the Board, because of the long hours that the staff puts in, the people put in. You get achievements, you set goals, you make your goals, people recognize that you've made your goals and then if you happen to be the one that's the Chair, you get the plaque, [MW laughs] as far as I figure. That's how I thought [of it]. I'm very honored to get them, but nobody gets those by themselves.

MW: During your time on the Board, it was basically almost a donation of public service time [laughs].

DD: Oh yes, ask my wife, she'll tell you.

MW: [Laughing]. Just talk about an average month. What is the time commitment it takes to be a Board member?

DD: You know, Margie, I don't know. Your day just starts and you start going to meetings. You have a full schedule and a lot of my meetings were for my employer, a lot of them were for the...

MW: For the Park District.

DD: ...And in some cases, you know, I was lucky enough I could mix them and maybe get a two for one.

MW: [Laughing]. That's great. It was a benefit for the Park District to have someone that already had connections. Why don't you tell us about what kind of value that did bring to the Park District.

DD: I spent a lot of time dealing with elected officials prior to coming to the Park District. The people were used to dealing with me. I could go into the legislators or congressman or whoever, whatever the case may be. Some of these people I would have known forever, I mean a long time.

MW: So you already had the credibility.

DD: I already had the credibility and I could talk about airports, talk about park districts, talk about a number of other things, and I think that did help the Park District. When I first came on the Board, I don't think the Park District spent as much time letting people know what they were about [and] how important what they did was to the community. They didn't have a presence in places [where] I thought they should have a presence, where I thought it would be important that people get to know the parks, hear of the parks, view the parks, see the parks, [etc.]

MW: Which led to funding for the parks.

DD: Which led to funding for the parks. I don't really know if the Park District did a lot of tours with legislators, city councils, and county commissioners before I came on board, but I knew that was one of the ways you could get people involved, get people's interest. Then when you went to them and said, "Here's what we want to do", they were familiar with it, they understood it. I think that probably was a benefit to the Park.

MW: It was probably the legacy you brought into the parks that nurtured that for the future. Because you're right, we probably hadn't done as much of that prior to that. One of the other things that I remember is, there was always this fear that this special park district would be consumed by Hennepin County. I think during your term that was sort of put to rest [laughs].

DD: When we first started this, that was part of the two people I talked about originally -- one wanted to take the Park District over, the other one wanted to get out of the park business. That's why I got involved. I don't think it took too long before, and if I

remember correctly, I don't think anybody wanted to take me on on an issue. To be blunt, it was probably not worth their time.

MW: I think your relationship to the County Board and the advocacy for the special park district solidified how effective a special park district was.

DD: Yes. I agree. I think that's true.

MW: You did all this service, we got all these things done. You left the Board in 2002, that's already seven years ago. After fourteen years of service, why did you decide to leave? I suppose I'm answering that question [Laughs].

DD: Actually, I decided to leave the Park District because I was going to retire from my real job. My wife and I decided that we were going to move out of the County and so I could no longer be on the Board. And that's what we did. I retired and now I don't have to go to meetings anymore. I'm a happy camper.

MW: [Laughing]. Well, it sounds like you had more than your share during the time that you were working on the Board. Looking back, what were the biggest changes you saw in the Park District? If you took that fourteen years, what were the biggest changes you saw?

DD: I think the staff and the Park Board started not only being a regional park district, but [also had] a better understanding of the region as a whole and how they fit into it and who they had to deal with. And so, what do we have? We have parks in six or seven counties. I used to meet with the County Commissioners where we had the parks and again, to go back, that's why you had to keep the maintenance up and you had to make sure everything's good. We did, and the staff did a great job. I would go meet with the County Commissioners where we had other parks, and I think we started reaching out to people more than we had in the past and figured out that we really are part of a bigger region.

MW: Right, and we just can't live in isolation politically...

DD: Right.

MW: ...or anything else.

DD: Right.

MW: So really, that start of intergovernmental cooperation happened a lot during your time.

DD: Right.

MW: In summary, what were the biggest challenges then? We talked about some of them, and maybe you could just highlight those again. In your fourteen years, what were those absolute biggest challenges?

DD: I think Lake Minnetonka was a big challenge. Other than that...

MW: LRT.

DD: ...LRT, yeah, but LRT was fun. I mean that was just a fun deal.

MW: Coon Rapids Dam [laughs].

DD: Yeah, well, and the Coon Rapids Dam. I think other than that, everything. I need to say that the staff here just did an excellent job. I worked with a lot of staff in a lot of different places--federally, state-wide, county-wide, city-wide--and this staff was just excellent. It was fun to work with the people. Of course when you're working with the parks instead of sewers or airports and stuff, it's a little easier to have a little more fun.

MW: [You] hope you have a little fun with it.

DD: Yes, and the staff did a great job.

MW: Great. Looking back, did you accomplish everything you hoped to, and if not, what...

DD: I don't know that anybody ever accomplishes everything they hope to do, but I felt reasonably satisfied that while on my time on the Park District we had done a lot of good things.

MW: You were in the heavy development [phase]. I mean, there's never going to be a period of time, that I can foresee, that we're going to acquire land and develop new parks like we did.

DD: I think that was a unique time. We always had a good story, always a lot of benefit for a lot of people. I think we were fortunate to get a lot of people on board at the right

time. And, I agree, I don't think there will be that much development, but it's all being utilized.

MW: You left us a lot to take care of [laughs].

DD: That's a lot of maintenance work, *a lot* of maintenance work.

MW: [Laughing]. A lot of maintenance work. What words of wisdom would you like to give the current Board and staff. [What were] the lessons you learned in serving and chairing on the Board of Commissioners, or just being a park advocate?

DD: Every situation is different. I don't know that I have any words of wisdom.

MW: I hear the "take care of it" [laughs].

DD: ...Well, take care of it, obviously. You take care of what you have. I am sure the Board that's here now is doing just fine. I know the staff will be doing fine. The Board should listen to the staff because this staff knows what they're talking about.

MW: Anything else that you would like to add?

DD: No.

MW: Okay. Well thank you very much. The Park District appreciates your years of service and your willingness to participate in this oral history project so we have it for all the future.

DD: Well, thank you for taking the time.

MW: Thank you.